

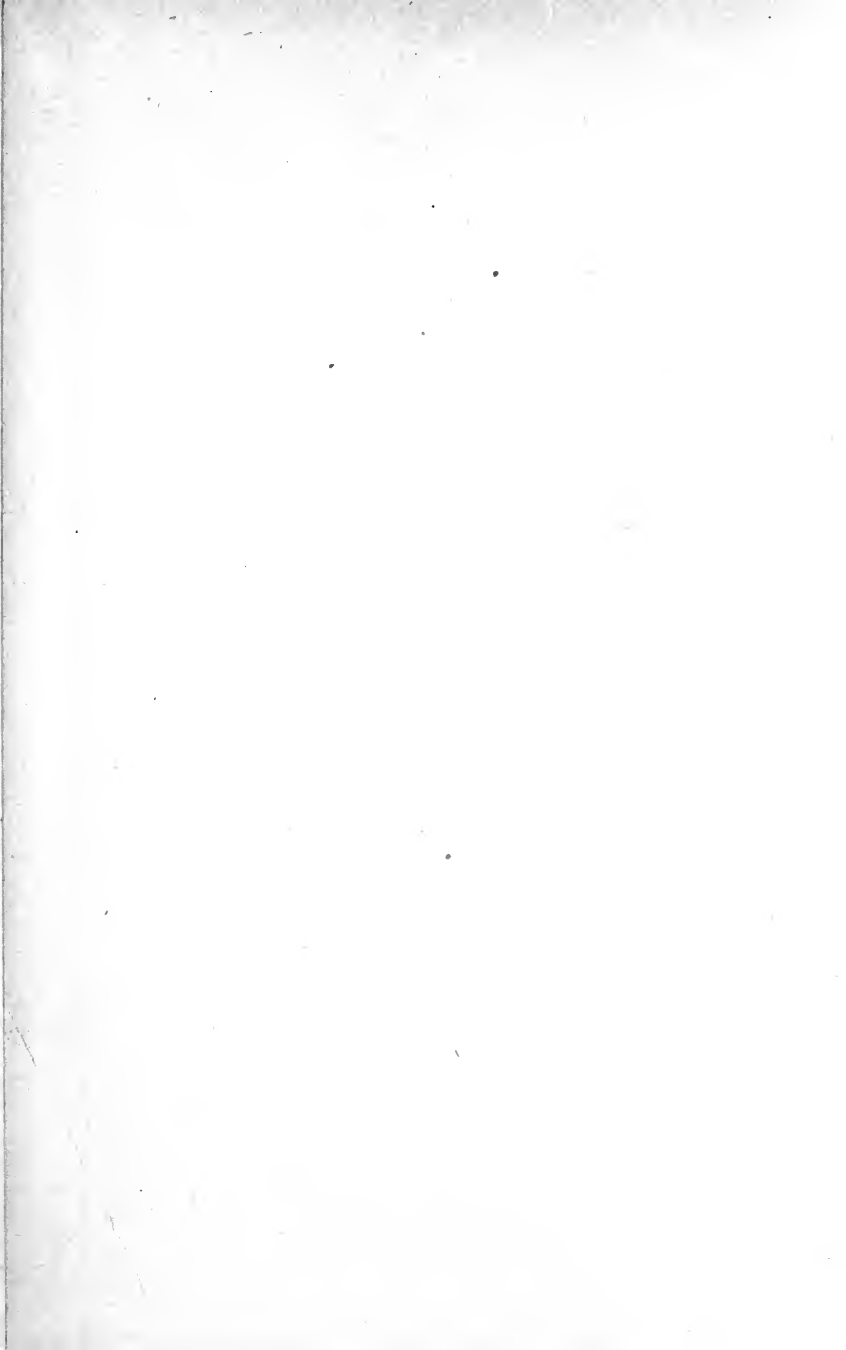
ON TRIAL

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She had returned to the subject uppermost in her mind

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THE STORY OF A WOMAN AT BAY

BY

ELMER L. REIZENSTEIN

Edith Rice

MADE INTO A BOOK FROM THE
PLAY OF THE SAME NAME

BY

D. TORBETT



ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
1915

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ON TRIAL



CHAPTER I

THE MURDER

So much that is inaccurate has appeared from time to time in the newspapers all over the country about the Trask murder, and the subsequent trial and acquittal of Robert Strickland, the defendant, that I have felt constrained in justice to all concerned to set matters right; not only by correcting these inaccuracies, but by narrating for the first time in detail some of the circumstances which, for lack of a better word, I may describe as extenuating, which undoubtedly influenced the jury in coming to their decision. If to some people I may seem to have been over-long in making up my mind to adopt this course, I have two explanations to offer for my procrastination: in the first place, I have been, and still am, reluctant to cause any additional suffering to a woman who must have already reached the point beyond which human endurance can hardly be expected to go, by reopening wounds which Time itself can never

fully heal ; secondly, I am conscious that my chief, if not my only, equipment for the task I am about to undertake is that I happen to be in possession of all the facts in the case, many of which—as any lawyer will understand—could not, for purely technical reasons, be brought before a jury.

I may be pardoned, by way of introduction, for saying a few words about myself to explain why and how I happen to be the person upon whose shoulders the responsibility for the performance of these duties seems to rest. My name is Malcolm Arbuckle. For nearly twenty years I have been known as a criminal lawyer, during which period I have met with unusual success—a circumstance which I attribute largely to fortune. Certainly I wish to make no pretensions to the possession of more than average ability, together with perhaps a *little* more than average persistence, a heritage of my Scottish blood.

In one way only has my career differed from that of most of my confrères at the Bar: I have never asked nor accepted for myself any fee from my clients. The greater part of them, indeed, would have been unable to pay me had I done so.

In the rare cases where, out of gratitude for such services as I have been able to render them, my clients have insisted upon paying me a fee, the sum has eventually been turned over to some charity upon the worthiness of which I have satisfied myself after careful inquiry. This conduct on my part has frequently been described as eccentric. But to all such criticism I am completely indifferent.

Left an orphan at an early age, and discovering upon attaining my majority that I was the possessor of a fortune giving me an income which one of my simple tastes and habits would never think of spending, I cast about in my mind for the vocation which would at once employ my leisure and afford me an opportunity for helping my fellow-men.

From my earliest youth, all tales of mystery and so-called "detective" stories have interested me more than any other form of light literature. By this confession, I am aware that I lay myself open to the charge of being a person of uncultivated taste, entirely lacking in nice discrimination. In my own defence I might cite two of the most

illustrious men of modern times: namely, Prince Bismarck and Mr. Gladstone, both of whom are said to have beguiled their leisure with the romances of Fortuné de Boisgobey and Emile Gaboriau.

Be that as it may, I admit that I find such tales most absorbing. Even the accounts of real crimes, so graphically set forth in our daily papers, interest me more than almost any other form of news. For years, I have made it a practice to follow every criminal trial most closely; in especial those which have to do with murder.

The shelves of my library are loaded with scrap-books containing accounts of all the most celebrated murder cases of the last twenty-five years. The ones which have never been cleared up are naturally the most fascinating. It would doubtless surprise my friends to know that I have in every one of these cases—sometimes only after months of study—been able to arrive at a solution which I am convinced is the true one. Perhaps in my old age, when time shall have removed the actors from the scenes of these tragic dramas, I shall offer these conclusions to the world.

It can readily be seen how this natural predisposition on my part determined me in the choice of a career. I decided to fit myself for the practice of law and to devote myself to defending those unfortunates accused of crime who were without means to regularly employ counsel for themselves.

And now we come to the Robert Strickland case. Most of my readers will probably recall the sensation caused by the murder of Gerald Trask, and the principal facts connected with that crime, as they appeared in the papers. It will, therefore, only be necessary to give a brief summary of the accounts that appeared in the New York papers on the morning of June 25th last.

When my servant, an elderly Scotsman who has been with me for a number of years, came to call me at his accustomed hour of half after seven, it did not need the arm full of papers he was carrying to tell me that they contained news of peculiar interest. One glance at his face would have been sufficient. I may add, parenthetically, that his interest in all matters criminal is second only to my own, and that he follows each case

with an interest which is as lively as it is intelligent.

More than once, I am bound to admit, some shrewd comment or observation on his part has been of real assistance when my own brain was temporarily befogged with pondering too long over some knotty problem. I have made it a practice upon numerous occasions to summon him to my study after I have arrived at a tentative conclusion, and have stated my case to him as I might put it before a jury. If he is not perfectly convinced—and he clearly understands that I rely upon him to be absolutely frank—I know that my argument requires strengthening.

He has never in the slightest degree presumed upon these departures from our ordinary relations, appearing the morning following our most hotly contested debates, with his accustomed air of respectful assiduity.

Ordinarily, I read the *Times* while at my breakfast. But McLean has his instructions to bring a copy of each of the morning papers whenever a new case is reported, as well as to look out for the later additions.

"Something unusual, McLean, to judge from your face," I said, sitting up in bed.

"Yes, indeed, sir. Mr. Gerald Trask, the banker, was shot and killed last night in his own library, and a friend of his, a Mr. Robert Strickland, was taken, you might almost say red-handed, with a pistol in his hand."

It is needless to say that nothing more was required to banish the last trace of drowsiness from my brain.

Gerald Trask was known to me personally, although our acquaintance was of the slightest: Robert Strickland, I knew by reputation only. But everything I had ever heard of him tended to show that he was a man of unusual probity and honesty.

I made haste with my toilet, nearly cutting myself while shaving—a thing which has not happened to me above a half dozen times in my life! Over my breakfast, I ran hastily through the papers.

Yes, it was in them all; the same extraordinary story varied only in unimportant details. The staring head-lines, one of them bristling with ex-

clamation points, could be read on the front page at arm's length.

TRASK THE BANKER MURDERED IN HIS LIBRARY!

MURDERER STRUCK DOWN BY DEVOTED
SECRETARY!

MRS. TRASK ALSO ATTACKED! HER ASSAILANT
ESCAPES! MOST DARING CRIME COM-
MITTED IN NEW YORK IN YEARS!
ROBBERY THE PROBABLE MOTIVE!

and so on, and so on, in the hysterical manner which even our best newspapers are pleased sometimes to affect.

Having carefully read each account and turned the papers over to McLean, who was doing his best to conceal his eagerness to have his turn at them; I went at once to my study and sat down to reduce to writing the plain narrative of the events which had transpired at the home of Gerald Trask the night before. At the end of about a quarter of an hour, I found that I had been able to make the following abstract of what appeared to be the principal (unverified) facts:

Shortly after nine-thirty o'clock, Gerald Trask had returned from Long Branch, New Jersey, to find his wife and his secretary, a young man by the name of Stanley Glover who lived in the house, and appears to have been on terms approaching intimacy with both his employer and his wife (a policy which both experience and observation have taught me will lead to trouble nine times out of ten, unless both parties possess unusual tact and discretion), chatting pleasantly in the library. At the end of ten or fifteen minutes, young Glover had withdrawn to his own room, with the purpose of checking over various tradesman's accounts for Mrs. Trask, the family being about to close the house preparatory to going away for the summer in accordance with their usual custom.

While he was still in the room, however, two incidents occurred which, in the light of subsequent events, seem to be not without significance. He had been obliged to await his employer's return before getting the account books from the safe, which was let into one of the walls of the room. The safe was a new one, and Mrs. Trask had

neglected to get the combination from her husband.

On being asked for the combination, Trask had searched vainly in all of his pockets for the card on which he, himself, had written it only the day before. Finally, he had come to the conclusion that he must have, inadvertently, *given it to his friend, Robert Strickland*, at whose apartment he had stopped for a moment on his way from the train.

He had, it seemed, invited Strickland to join a fishing party at Long Branch for the following Sunday, and had written the address of his house on a card which he had taken from his pocket without examining the other side. As none of the cards still remaining in his card-case had the desired combination written on it, it seemed only logical to suppose that he had carelessly used that particular one on which to write the address. However, with an effort of memory, he was able to recall the necessary succession of numbers, and had opened the safe himself.

Furthermore, it appears that Strickland had been in considerable financial difficulty for some

little time, through no immediate fault of his own. Trask had accepted his note for ten thousand dollars, which note had fallen due two days before, that is to say, on the 22nd inst.

The mention of Strickland's name had recalled to the careful secretary the fact that this note was over-due. On his mentioning this circumstance, Trask had taken ten one thousand dollar bills from his pocket, laughingly explaining that Strickland had paid the note that very evening in this very unusual manner on the ground that it had been so darned hard to get, that he wanted the pleasure of paying it in cash, rather than by check. (A most unbusiness-like and childish proceeding for which, I may say, I cannot find any excuse.) Before leaving the room, the secretary had *placed this money in the safe* with the understanding that he was to deposit it properly in the morning without fail.

How long after his departure she and her husband continued their conversation Mrs. Trask is unable to say. (This seems reasonable, as she is still in a very emotional and excited condition.) At most, she thinks it could not have been longer

than half an hour. They went to their respective bedrooms, both of which appear to open off the library. (I should like to see a plan of the house.) She had hardly begun her toilet for the night, when she fancied that she heard a slight noise in the room she had just quitted. Supposing that it was her husband returning for a book or a magazine, she opened the door to beg him not to read late. (It seems that he had the bad habit of reading in bed; a practice which cannot fail to be injurious to the eyes.)

She had no sooner stepped into the room, than she was seized by the throat by a man who seemed to spring from behind the door. At the same moment her head was enveloped in a towel or cloth of some sort, and she was forced to the floor. (The cloth thrown over her head turns out to have been an embroidered scarf, or table cloth, which her assailant had snatched from the library table, presumedly for the purpose of preventing her from crying out.) She was only able to give a muffled scream before her head struck heavily against the edge of a leather divan that stood in the room.

She was on the point of losing consciousness, partly from the blow caused by the impact of her head against the furniture, and partly from the tight hold on her throat, when she became aware that the room, up to that moment in complete darkness, was suddenly flooded with light. From what seemed to her a long way off, she heard her husband's voice at the telephone. Whether he had come into the room in response to a ring from the telephone, she is unable to say.

The next instant three things occurred almost simultaneously. There came the quick report of a pistol shot (she does not pretend to have recognised what it was at the time), the grip on her throat was suddenly relaxed, and, as with a scream she attempted to free her head from the scarf and struggle to her feet, she heard her husband exclaim: "Strickland!"

She had just succeeded in getting the scarf partly away from her face when the pistol rang out again. She saw her husband reel and fall, as Glover, armed with a heavy stick, rushed in and felled the assassin with a blow on the arm, the pistol falling from his hand as he went down.

Young Glover seems to have acted with admirable presence of mind. He at once telephoned for the nearest doctor, ordered the butler to stand guard over the disabled Strickland, while he, himself, examined the contents of the safe, the door of which stood open.

Everything was intact except the drawer in which, a little earlier, he had placed the ten one thousand dollar bills. They were missing. Having despatched another of the men servants in search of the police, he saw to it that, as far as possible, the room was left in the exact condition in which he had found it. Even the French windows at the back of the room were left open, indicating the probable course taken by the man who had half strangled Mrs. Trask.

He thought of another thing. The card upon which was written the numbers making the combination of the safe, which Trask thought he must have given to Strickland, might reasonably be supposed to be still in his possession. He bent over the man, still lying on the floor, groaning with pain, and searched his pockets. The card was in one of the side pockets of his coat. After the



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She heard her husband exclaim: "Strickland!"



arrival of the police, the safe was closed and re-opened by means of the combination found on this card.

The doctor, a physician by the name of Morgan, found that Trask must have died instantly. The second shot had entered the body just above the left breast, and had penetrated the heart. The first one had merely grazed the right shoulder. Finding that it was too late to do anything for Trask, Dr. Morgan turned his attention to Strickland whose arm was badly fractured by the blow from Glover's heavy cane. He was in great pain.

A search of the house showed that nothing had been disturbed in any way outside of the room in which the tragedy had occurred. No examination of the ground outside of the French windows was attempted. (It would have been a waste of time in any case, as two of the servants had dashed out that way as soon as they learned that Mrs. Trask's assailant had escaped. Any clues that might have otherwise been of value would have been hopelessly confused, where not entirely obliterated. The secretary should, of course, have thought of this and prevented all such futile running about.

But he is young and, on the whole, conducted himself with a presence of mind not often found in a man of his years.)

Having carefully gone over my summary, and satisfied myself that I had left out nothing, however trifling, which might have any bearing on the case—it is hardly necessary to say that I discarded all the theories both of the reporters and the detectives which, to my mind, occupied a large amount of space that might have been used to much better purpose if they had printed the multiplication table, which would have been quite as interesting and much more instructive—I prepared to go out for a long walk. It has always been my experience that my mind works more clearly in the open.

I had no business for the moment that was at all pressing. While I had no reason to suppose that I would ever have any official connection with the Strickland case—for Strickland must have many friends who would back him at least to the extent of engaging a lawyer—it nevertheless intrigued my interest.

Certainly, on the surface, it presented no prob-

lem. It was as simple as two plus two equals four, according to the sleuths of the press. A man, entering a house for the purpose of robbery, kills the owner who recognises him, upon being surprised in the act. As for the other man who at the same time had attacked the owner's wife? Well, he was an accomplice. What else *could* he be? All very pretty; but I took no stock in it whatever.

Telling McLean that I might not be back until dinner time—a piece of information which he received with an air of dazed respect, showing that, for the moment, his mind was entirely occupied with his papers—I left the house bound for the Park. On the way up, I would make it a point to take a look at the late home of Gerald Trask, which would only take me a little out of my way.

CHAPTER II

I MEET WITH UNEXPECTED SUPPORT

I CANNOT say that my walk was productive of any very wonderful inspiration. Not that I had had any expectation that it would be. I had, so far, too few facts to enable me to build up much of a theory. I have always held with those who declare that the only way to attack a problem of the nature of the one that just now possessed me was to approach it with a perfectly open mind, entirely without prejudice. But I am, I hope, sufficiently honest to confess that in this particular case I was unable to do so. I deferred debating the matter with myself, however, until I should have had a look at the Trask house with which, as I have said, I was not familiar.

As I had surmised, there was little to be seen when I reached the street. The usual crowd of persons inspired by morbid curiosity were before me. A small force of police were occupied in keeping the ever-increasing mob in motion. After

all, it was only natural. The papers had "played up" the murder too well for any one with a serious purpose in studying the scene of the crime to have any chance, at least for the moment.

Already, although it lacked fully two hours till noon, the newsboys were hawking extras purporting to throw fresh light on the Trask murder, on every street corner. I noticed that they seemed to be doing a thriving business in the crowd around the Trask house. How some of the ragged tatterdemalions were able to afford the penny for the purchase, was a mystery.

I would have been willing to wager a considerable sum—and I am not in the habit of betting, as a rule—that the majority of the persons before me had heard Gerald Trask's name for the first time in their lives within the last twelve hours. And yet from the scraps of conversation which I overheard during the short time I remained in the neighbourhood, one would have judged that many of them were on terms approaching intimacy, if not with him, with some member of the family. Certainly few of them looked as if they were drawn from the class which

would have supposedly formed either the business or social associates of the late banker. Truly, human vanity manifests itself in curious ways!

While moralising after this fashion, I took as careful a look at the darkened house as the circumstances permitted. I confess to having experienced a momentary longing to break through the police guard and mount the steps to that door behind which lay the possible solution of the mystery which so greatly interested me. I would have, just then, given a good deal to be left by myself in that darkened room, the scene of the murder.

The house itself had no intrinsic interest from an artistic or architectural point of view. Its "note" was a certain solidity—the sort of home appropriate for a sound man of business who cared nothing for display. It differed but little from its neighbours. Owing to the fact that it stood at the end of a long row of similar buildings, it had the advantage of appearing a little larger because it had more ground. At some time or another, the banker had bought the corner lot which had been utilised as a small flower garden.

It was through this enclosure, apparently, that Mrs. Trask's assailant had made his escape. Nothing could have been easier. Even as I passed, I noticed that the low iron gate in the fence would have presented no obstacle to a man of ordinary activity. I felt quite certain that I could have vaulted it myself. A broad walk of heavy flag-stone bisected the little garden. Right under a sort of bay-window—or rather, a sort of alcove whose three sides were composed of so-called French windows, and which had apparently been added after the house was built—it took a sharp turn towards the back of the house. A man, stepping out of one of these windows had nothing to do but run down the walk, come out through, or over, the gate, and go on down the street. A hedge, which grew back of the ornamental iron fence, would have screened him sufficiently to make it an easy matter.

Satisfied that there was nothing more to be seen at present, I proceeded on my way to the Park. Once there, I selected one of those uncomfortable benches whose backs curve at exactly the wrong place with which the authorities have chosen to

equip our pleasure ground, and gave myself up to a fresh consideration of the few facts in the case that were in my possession.

That Gerald Trask had been murdered by Robert Strickland seemed to be beyond dispute. He had been taken "red handed," to use McLean's expression, with a pistol in his hand, standing over the body of his victim. The remote possibility that Trask had been shot by the other man, I dismissed for two reasons. In the first place, although there was nothing in Mrs. Trask's statement to show that she had ever laid eyes on Strickland before, the fact that she heard her husband call out: "Strickland!" as she described, showed that it was on him that his attention was focussed. Granted, for the moment, that the other man had done the shooting, and escaped with his pistol as well as the ten thousand dollars, what was Strickland doing with his pistol? If he had drawn it to defend his friend, why had he not fired at the murderer as he made his dash for freedom? There were only two shots fired, and both were accounted for by the doctor. Above all, what was Strickland doing in his friend's house,

having entered by stealth, at that time of night?

In the second place, I was by no means satisfied that there had ever *been* another man. There was nothing in Mrs. Trask's account to establish the fact of his presence. No one had seen him. She had been seized by the throat on entering the room. The scarf had been thrown over her head at the same time. It seemed perfectly possible for a man of average strength to hold a dazed and frightened woman by his left hand while he fired his pistol with his right. What was there to show that Strickland had not acted alone?

But how about the ten thousand dollars which was missing from the safe, I hear you ask. There seemed to be no doubt that the secretary had placed it there while his employer and his wife were in the room. It certainly was not there when he examined the safe later. And when he had searched Strickland's pocket for the incriminating card, he had not found it. Had Strickland hurled it back of some piece of furniture, or thrown it under the divan, or otherwise ridden himself of

it before Glover struck him down? That would argue that he had anticipated the attack.

A man would hardly go to the length of entering the house of the man who had been his benefactor for the purpose of stealing the money which he had paid him earlier in the evening, too late to be deposited in the regular way in the bank, shoot him down in cold blood, and then throw away the booty which he had risked so much to get. Even if he had escaped for the moment, and it never occurred to any one to search the room for the missing money, how could he ever hope, hunted as a murderer, to be able to come back and recover it? The idea was absurd. But I had my own theory about that missing money which I was for the moment keeping in the back of my mind until I should have something more tangible than I had at present to go on.

While, as I have said, I had no acquaintance with Robert Strickland, everything that I had ever heard of him—and I had heard a good deal at one time and another—was opposed to the theory that he had entered the Trask house for the purpose of robbing the safe. That he had come with some

sinister purpose could not be denied. Otherwise, he would have come in the ordinary way to the front door, no matter how late the hour, if his business had been sufficiently urgent. But it must also be remembered that he had already seen Trask earlier in the evening, and that the hour could not be considered extraordinarily late, for the whole shocking affair had taken place before midnight. Whatever his purpose, I was convinced—and here is where I threw the theory of approaching my problem with an unprejudiced and open mind overboard—that it had nothing to do with the ten thousand dollars. Another argument against the presence of the other man in the room. It would be stretching the long arm of coincidence pretty far to suggest that by chance two men, unknown to each other, had entered the same house the same night, each with his own secret and unlawful purpose.

Of course I was perfectly aware that my theories would be considered the fantastic vapourings of an amateur by the professional detectives. No doubt they had already built up the case on the foundation that Strickland had come to rob

the safe bringing his accomplice, a professional safe-cracker, naturally, with him. The murder that followed was an unpremeditated accident. It had been no part of the original plan, and was merely the desperate effort of the detected thief to make good his escape. He had to kill the only person who could have identified him. The whole thing was as simple as A-B-C! So it was, if one could believe it. I couldn't.

Still, I had to acknowledge to myself that I had as yet nothing to offer in substitution for what I foresaw would be the popular and accepted version of the crime and the motives behind it. Nothing that I knew of Strickland was of the least assistance whatever. Would my knowledge of Trask be of greater help? Let us see.

Gerald Trask I *had* known personally. He happened to belong to my club, and it was there, if I remember correctly, that I first met him. I could not recall that I had ever had any conversation of any length with him either there or anywhere else. I am not much of a club man at best. I am sometimes a whole month without entering either of the clubs to which I belong.

Trask, who was what is vaguely described as a man-about-town, and who I learn from the papers, belonged to half a dozen other clubs, probably preferred any of the others to the one in which we shared the honour of membership. Indeed, I had once overheard him admit to a friend that he considered it absurdly old foggy. Well, I can only say that I think that most of the members were well content that he should think so. I know I was.

For there is no doubt that Gerald Trask was not popular with men. Just why, it would perhaps be difficult to say. He was superficially a suave, polished man-of-the-world. There was no criticism to be made of his manners. He was, if anything, a shade too coldly polite. Upon occasion he affected a sort of cordiality. But it never rang true. He never could disguise a certain cynical hardness which one felt was his real disposition. Behind his mask of good-fellowship, there lurked something intrinsically repellent.

His reputation for honesty in business was of the best. But his reputation outside of his business left much to be desired. I cannot recall

that I ever heard any definite charge made against him, but he had an evil repute where women were concerned. How it arose, I do not know, but it certainly existed. Was it not possible that a woman was at the bottom of the whole tragedy? Some woman in whom both the men were interested?

Of his wife, I knew little. I never saw her to my knowledge. She had the reputation of caring a great deal for society. I have seen her picture frequently in the papers. I believe that she is considered handsome in a large, imposing, cold way. They have, I think, one or two children still at school. The only person I ever heard speak of Mrs. Trask is a woman, an old friend of my own, who also goes a great deal into society. I happened to be dining at her house—a thing which I regularly do twice a year—when the woman I had taken in to dinner happened to speak of Gerald Trask and asked me if I knew him.

“I just know him,” I said. “He happens to belong to the same club I do. But we have hardly more than a nodding acquaintance.”

She smiled in a knowing fashion. "I understand," she said. "I never met a man who confessed to knowing him better than that."

"But I assure you—" I began.

She didn't even give me a chance to complete my sentence. "Ethel," she called down the table to our hostess, "here's another man who only knows Gerald Trask to bow to! Doesn't that prove what I have always said?"

"It only proves," said Mrs. Williamson calmly, "that he doesn't know Joan Trask. I have known her longer than any one in town. I went to school with her. I am far from defending him. But I *do* say that Joan Trask is the explanation for all the stories that are told about her husband."

From which I inferred that if Gerald Trask were not a man's man, his wife was not a woman's woman.

Robert Strickland was also married, I had heard. But I had an idea that he and his wife had always lived very quietly, caring little for society. I had been told that they had one child. Whether it was a boy or a girl, I did not for the

moment recall. His friends had, naturally, not seen so much of him since he had met with his financial reverses. It was said that he was planning to leave New York to try his fortunes some place in the West.

These meagre facts, together with the ones I have already recapitulated from the newspapers, represented the sum total of my knowledge of the principal characters in the drama which was about to be unfolded, and in which I was to have a much greater interest than I yet suspected.

Having discovered that it was far past my regular hour for luncheon—a fact which annoyed me greatly, for I am a strong believer in regularity in the general conduct of life—I made my way to a quiet hotel in the neighbourhood where I knew that the cooking was plain and good and the prices reasonable. The chief objection to eating away from one's home now-a-days is that you never know what you are eating nor what you are going to be asked to pay. I make it a rule to have all my meals at my own house with rare exceptions. This, of course, was an exceptional occasion.

After having spent some little time over a lunch that was quite satisfactory, all things being considered, I determined to dismiss the Trask murder from my mind for the time being. Nothing was to be gained by stewing over it any longer until some fresh facts presented themselves. I had some pottering work, the sort of thing that one can do without using much thought, that I always keep on hand for just such occasions. I would go home and paste up some articles in my scrap-book. I made up my mind to have a cold supper in place of my usual dinner. My forgetfulness about my noon-day meal had upset my routine for the day.

McLean being out when I returned home, I wrote the necessary directions on the slate which hangs in the back of the hall for that purpose. I found it impossible to interest myself in my scrap-book, so, firmly determined not to let my mind return to the forbidden subject, I threw myself on the sofa in my library with a new mystery story which had just come in a package with a number of others from my bookseller's. I fear the worthy man has a small opinion of my liter-

ary tastes. I have a standing order with him to supply me with all the detective stories in French, Italian, and English as fast as they appear. The one I selected was of slight interest. In a few moments I gave it up and, feeling excessively drowsy, fell asleep.

It was over an hour later that McLean awoke me to tell me that my supper was ready. When I reached the dining-room, I found the evening papers lying on the end of the table. A glance at the headlines convinced me that there was nothing new of any importance. Probably there wouldn't be until after the inquest.

Supper over, I took the opportunity while McLean was bringing me the cigars, to ask him what he thought of the affair on the whole. I could tell by his manner that he suspected me of wishing to draw him out without letting him know my own opinions. Consequently he was more than usually cautious, which, in McLean, a typical Scot, is saying a great deal. I saw that I would have to give him a lead.

“What is your idea about the other man?

The accomplice, or whatever you choose to call him; the one who got the money?"

But McLean was not to be had so easily. He hadn't seen it stated anywhere that any man got the money.

"You certainly read that a sum of money had disappeared from the safe?"

"Yes. I read that."

"Well? Or perhaps you don't believe the secretary's story about putting the ten thousand dollars in the safe with his own hands?"

"Yes. I believe he did what he said."

"Oh, then you think that it is still there, perhaps. That in his excitement he overlooked it. Is that your idea?"

"No, sir, I do not. I think that, for a young man, he kept his head very cool indeed. I think that if it was there when he was looking for it, he would have found it."

"But if it wasn't there, who *did* get it? I asked you if you thought that the man who half strangled Mrs. Trask got it."

McLean's lip twitched slightly.

"No, sir, I don't think *he* got it," he said dryly.

"And why not, pray?" I asked, in pretended surprise.

"Because I'm not at all sure that he was ever there. I've yet to hear of any one who really saw him."

"But Mrs. Trask?"

"She didn't see him."

"Man alive! He half choked her!"

"She didn't see him," repeated McLean doggedly.

"Oh! Then you think that it was Strickland with whom she had the struggle?"

"Perhaps."

"And that it was *he* who got the money?"

"I'm not saying that."

I sprang out of my chair with a movement of impatience and began to pace up and down the room. As a matter of fact I didn't want McLean to see my face. I confess to not having the self-control that my admirable domestic possesses!

"Well, if there was no such man there as Mrs. Trask seems to believe, and Strickland didn't get

the money, and it isn't still in the safe, then there is only the secretary left, and he didn't put it there in the first place after all."

"I think you're forgetting some one, sir."

At that moment I was fortunately walking towards the other end of the room. By the time I had turned, I was able to look completely puzzled.

"Who on earth can you mean?"

McLean gave me a look which suggested that he was not in the least taken in.

"Mrs. Trask, sir."

"Mrs. Trask! You think *she* took the money?"

"I do, sir."

"Robbed her own husband?"

"She wouldn't be the first woman who's done it." McLean is revoltingly cynical, in the matter of women.

"Perhaps you think she killed him as well?"

He paid no attention to this question.

"But she didn't know the combination of the safe."

"Neither did the secretary, sir."

"The only two people who could have known it were Trask, himself, and Strickland."

"Maybe Trask had the money, then. I haven't heard that they searched his pockets."

"But they *did* search Strickland's. The secretary couldn't have missed those bills when he was going through Strickland's pockets looking for that card."

"Exactly."

"But don't you remember that Mrs. Trask didn't know the combination of the safe? It is explicitly stated that it was a new one and that she had neglected to get the combination from her husband. That's why Glover had to wait until Trask returned before he could get the books he wanted out of the safe. And it was Trask, himself, who opened it after his return. You don't pretend to believe that any one not an experienced safe-opener could master a combination consisting of a succession of numbers from seeing another person use it once?"

"No, I don't think she could have."

"What *do* you think, then?"

"I think that even if it was true that she didn't

know it in the first place, she had plenty of time to find it out while she was talking to her husband after the secretary had gone upstairs. It looks as if she had always known it before. She could ask for it perfectly naturally while the subject was fresh in her mind."

And I hadn't thought of that!

"She must have had some definite scheme for accounting for the disappearance of the money in the morning."

"Well, she didn't have to use it if she did."

I couldn't dispute that!

CHAPTER III

THE INQUEST

As I have said, the evening papers contained nothing of any importance. The same might be said of the papers on the following morning. I do not mean that columns were not devoted to the "Great Trask Murder Mystery." It was "featured" on all the front pages, and overflowed onto many others to the exclusion of almost all other news, it seemed. Fortunately, at the particular time at which the murder had occurred there seemed to be a dearth of news of importance.

I would not go so far as to say that newspaper reporters are sufficiently hardened to pray for murder stories, but I do think that they accept them philosophically as they accept much else that is disagreeable, and with a distinct feeling of gratitude when they arrive in a season which is as dull from a news point of view as the summer often is.

I left the thorough reading of them to McLean,

who devoured the smallest paragraph. I was quite content to skim through them, knowing well that if he came across anything really significant, he would keep me informed. But I saw enough of them to assure me that the marvellous ingenuity of my friends of the press showed no sign of approaching exhaustion.

The most elaborate and ingenious solutions were spun from the most tenuous of threads. Facts that could not be explained away were ignored. Everybody who had the most remote connection with the case was interviewed. The chase for the missing accomplice was in full cry. But the only thing that was accomplished in that direction was to throw suspicion for a moment on a rich South American, who had carelessly tendered a thousand dollar bill in payment for a purchase in one of the largest shops.

Two things I noted with interest. No one seemed to doubt the existence of the second man, and if any one shared with McLean and me the suspicion that Mrs. Trask might be able to account for the missing bills, it was carefully kept out of print. There was one other thing that

both puzzled and interested me. Every one connected with the Trask family, relatives and servants alike, had been cross-examined. But of Mrs. Strickland, the wife of the accused man, no slightest mention had been made. As far as I could ascertain, she had not even been to see her husband since his detention.

It was quite natural to suppose that this terrible blow had prostrated her. But, if so, was not that an important bit of news? And what woman as devoted to her husband as Mrs. Strickland was said to be would not have been able to draw upon that marvellous nervous force which even the weakest women possess sufficiently to enable her to take her place at his side in this dreadful time? I was convinced that there was more in this singular reticence in regard to Mrs. Strickland than met the eye.

The hour appointed for the inquest found me early at the door of the court room. I had anticipated that the widespread interest in this case, presenting as it did, such unusual features, would draw a perfect throng of the same class of persons as still haunted the scene of the crime. I may

say that I was not disappointed. Fortunately, I was sufficiently well known to obtain entrance without trouble.

I had no sooner found a seat well up toward the front of the room where I could both see and hear everything, than I noticed McLean standing at the far end, near one of the windows. Just how he had managed to get in, I am not sure—a great number of people had been turned away—but I have a shrewd suspicion that he is nearly, if not quite, as well known to the minor officials as I am. He had asked if he might have a few hours off. It would not have been McLean, if he had mentioned what he purposed doing with his leisure. But I was not at all surprised at seeing him.

I am not going to give a detailed account of the proceedings. Naturally, all the salient points of the evidence that came out at the inquest, were brought forth again at the trial. But there were a number of things that would have struck any intelligent layman, interested in the case, as important and interesting.

The figure that commanded the most attention

was that of the widow of the murdered man. She was dressed in the deepest mourning and her face, except during the time she was on the stand, was completely shrouded in a heavy veil. I was struck by the fact that she was both like and unlike the published portraits I had seen of her.

In so far as they showed her to be a large, imposing woman of a pronounced blond type, the portraits were accurate. But what they utterly failed to convey—and what, just why I cannot say, surprised me—was that she possessed far more animation than one usually expects from a person of her rather bovine type of beauty. To be sure, this animation might be described as intermittent. She would proceed coldly and evenly without any sign of emotion for some little time; then her eyes and her whole face would lighten with a flash that was not without a certain venomous suggestion.

Curiously enough, these flashes—I can think of no better word to use—put me in mind of nothing so much as of the illumination that follows the sudden turning on of an incandescent electric light. Just as their subsidence—which left her

face wearing its habitual (I am convinced that it was habitual!) look of guarded calm—brought to mind the switching off of the same light. I began to be greatly interested in noting just what questions, or just what things in her testimony produced them. But of that, later.

I admit that the impression that Mrs. Trask produced on me was not a favourable one. That she was a woman of a certain force, was unquestionable. But that that force frequently took the form of obstinacy, I was perfectly convinced.

Her whole manner, while on the stand, was not that of a woman recently bereaved, and in so sudden and terrible a fashion. One gathered the impression that her mind was more fully occupied with thoughts of revenge than taken up with sorrow over the loss she had sustained.

Indeed, her voice never faltered even while she was bearing witness to the dreadful scene she had gone through. Even in her account of the last conversation that she was ever destined to hold with her husband, her icy composure never deserted her, no note of tenderness ever crept into her cold voice. I began to read new meanings

into my friend Mrs. Williamson's remark about her. Common report said that the Trasks had not been happy in their married life. Every tone of the widow of Gerald Trask was a confirmation of this report.

The only other witness of importance—for I pass, for the present, over the doctor and one or two others of less interest from the point of view of their personalities—was the young secretary, Stanley Glover.

He came to the stand with a certain brisk smartness, subdued by his consciousness of the seriousness of the occasion, and the important part he was called upon to take in the proceedings. Like most young people, particularly those inexperienced in appearing in courts, he displayed a tendency to be too voluble. An inquest allows of greater latitude than a more formal trial. But young Mr. Glover would have gone beyond bounds even then, had he not constantly been held in check.

However, his excessive willingness to tell all that he knew and had heard, as well as the various deductions which he, himself, drew from the cir-

cumstances, coupled with what *others* had seen and heard and related to him later, did not militate against the generally favourable impression which he made, not only on me, but, as I could plainly perceive, on the whole audience.

His appearance might have been described as "dapper." Without being handsome, he was by no means bad looking. He had that direct glance which always makes a good impression; implying, as it does, the possession of a frank and open nature. From his ready and self-possessed replies, I judged that his was an alert and active mind. No doubt, an admirable secretary for a man of affairs.

I waited for nothing more after the secretary had left the stand. Whatever testimony was to follow would be more or less a matter of routine; a confirmation of what I had already heard on the part of the police and some of the servants who had been despatched for them or for the doctor. The result of the inquest was, of course, a foregone conclusion. Robert Strickland would be indicted for murder, and the popular verdict would be that he was guilty of robbery as well.

Of his guilt on the latter count, I have already recorded my opinion.

Once home and in my study, I drew out the abstract to which I have already referred, in order to make some additions. I was pleased to find that I had only one correction to make. The newspapers had placed the hour of Gerald Trask's return somewhat earlier than that testified to by his wife and his secretary at the inquest. That might easily be accounted for by the fact that in their first agitation they had both fallen into a slight inaccuracy which they were able to rectify in their calmer moments. As to whether it was of importance, I was not prepared to decide as yet.

I give the substance of Mrs. Trask's evidence merely. Not being a shorthand reporter, I make no attempt to repeat it verbatim, or to cast it in the form of questions and answers in which it was, naturally, given at the inquest.

She had been dining out with friends, but had left them at the conclusion of the dinner, reaching home about half-past nine o'clock. (Trask, therefore, could not have returned shortly after

nine, as his wife and secretary had been conversing some moments before his arrival.) As she came in the front door, she heard the telephone in the library ring. She went at once into the library to answer it.

A voice—a woman's voice (it was here that I first noticed one of those strange flashes in her face)—asked if she were speaking to 182 River. Mrs. Trask having answered in the affirmative, the voice went on to ask for Mr. Trask. Having said that he was not in, the witness asked the name of the person who was calling, and what she wanted to talk to Mr. Trask about. As a proof that she felt within her rights in making this unusual request, she explained that she was Mr. Trask's wife. (If her manner at the time was as forbidding as it was when she related the incident, I am not surprised that she got no satisfaction.) In place of answering, the woman at the other end of the line asked when Mr. Trask was expected to return. Mrs. Trask did not know.

She had just rung off, when young Glover came in, having heard, as he thought, the telephone

ring. He had been upstairs in his room, which seems to have been above the library. The fact that both rooms had their windows open explains how he could have heard it. Mrs. Trask said that she had answered the ring herself, and that some woman was calling her husband. She demanded of Glover if he knew what woman would be likely to call Mr. Trask at his house at that hour of the evening.

Of course the secretary had no ideas on the subject. (I'd trust him for that.) Mrs. Trask had then asked if the secretary was expecting her husband home that night. Yes; he was expected on the 9.12 train, Glover had told her. He would probably be back at any moment, as it was just half-past nine. Mrs. Trask had permitted herself to wonder what he was doing at Long Branch at this particular time, considering that the entire family were to move down the following week and that they would be there all summer. Which reminded her that she wanted the secretary to go over her tradesmen's accounts before they left.

Glover had volunteered to do it at once, and

had gone over to the safe to get the books. Finding it locked, he had asked Mrs. Trask if she would give him the combination. She confessed to having neglected to ask for it. The new safe had only been in a short time. As Glover never had occasion to open the safe when his employer was away, he had never had the combination of either the old one or the new one. (A very wise and sensible precaution on his part.)

Mrs. Trask had just remarked that she must remember to ask her husband for it, when the door opened and Trask appeared. The witness admitted that she and her husband had had a few words on the subject of the woman who had called up. (Again her face became luminous.) She insisting that he must know who it was, and he asserting just as positively that he hadn't the least idea of whom it could have been. Probably to create a diversion—for one can readily imagine that such discussions were embarrassing for the secretary—Glover had asked his employer to open the safe that he might get the desired books. But although Trask turned his pockets inside out, one after another, in searching for the card upon which

he had written the new combination, he could not find it.

He grew quite irritated over the matter, receiving the various suggestions offered by his companions with rising ill-humour. Perhaps he had left it in some other suit. He might have pulled it out inadvertently with something else. He might even have left it down at Long Branch. He vetoed all these suggestions. He had reason to know that he had had it in the inside pocket of the coat he had on, for he had opened the safe just before leaving to get his check book the morning before he left.

Finally, he remembered what he had done with it. He had given it to his friend Strickland. Upon Glover expressing his surprise, he explained that he had just come from Strickland's flat. That he had invited him to come down to Long Branch for Sunday, and had written the address on the card for him. He had never stopped to look on the other side of the card. He was sorry, but Glover would have to wait until the next day for his books, unless, by chance, he was able to get the combination from memory.

After trying two or three combinations he was able to hit upon the right one and threw open the door of the safe with an invitation to Glover to help himself.

Confessing that he was tired out from golfing all day, he told the secretary that he should not require him further that evening, but kindly invited him to join the fishing party for Sunday morning. They would go down Saturday night, and Strickland was coming with them.

The repetition of Strickland's name, recalled to Glover the matter of the note due two days before. Trask explained that it had been paid. Strickland had returned from Cleveland, Ohio, only that same evening. From the train he had telegraphed asking Trask to meet him at his house. He had not only taken up the note, but he had paid the amount in cash, that is, in ten one thousand dollar bills.

Both Mrs. Trask and Glover had expressed their wonder over a proceeding so very unbusiness-like. But Trask, while admitting that their criticism was a just one, had related how Strickland had said that "It had been so darned hard

to get that he wanted the pleasure of handing him the actual money." (I have commented upon the childishness of this action before.)

There had followed a little discussion between the two men, in which Mrs. Trask confessed that she had taken little interest, and had not therefore followed it very closely, as to the new prospect which Strickland's Western venture seemed to hold out. They both appeared to be genuinely glad that his luck seemed about to change. It had been particularly hard for him to bear his late troubles with equanimity on account of his devotion to his wife. The mention of Mrs. Strickland had re-awaked Mrs. Trask's interest in the conversation. (I would have been surprised if it hadn't!) She had asked what Mrs. Strickland was like; if she were a nice woman, and if she were pretty. Her husband had declared himself unable to answer any of these questions. As it happened, he had never met the lady. He had directed Glover to put the money in the safe, and to deposit it the first thing in the morning.

Glover had obeyed, and having been told that

nothing more was required of him had locked the safe and prepared to retire to his own room, promising Mrs. Trask that he would have the books ready for her in the morning. Just as he was going out, Trask called after him to ask him to remind him to get the card with the combination written on it back from Strickland as soon as he saw him, remarking that it was a damned careless piece of business on his part.

Mrs. Trask admitted with a reluctance, of the genuineness of which I was by no means convinced, that, after the secretary had taken himself off, she had returned to the subject uppermost in her mind: the woman at the telephone. Again, she demanded to know who it was. Again he had reiterated that he had no idea. They had had a quarrel over the matter. Even if she had been really reluctant to speak of the matter in the first place, there was no doubt about the fact that she described their quarrel with a certain zest. She admitted that it had been a more serious quarrel than they had had for a very long time. She even said that it had been thirteen years since they had had so serious a difference.

She had even threatened him with divorce, although on what particular grounds she proposed to apply for one, she did not say. And then a curious thing came out which had no direct bearing on the subject of their immediate quarrel. It appears that for six years, that is during the life of the elder Trask, his son's marriage had been kept secret.

Mrs. Trask for six years, as she expressed it, had "hidden herself away." She admitted that she had alluded to that part of her life in the progress of their recriminations. One could see that with her it was an abiding source of bitterness. (I must confess that I didn't wonder at that.) In the end, they had kissed and made up, and Trask once again declaring that he was completely fagged out, they had separated for the night.

Her account of the murder and of the things that immediately preceded it, differed in no way from what I had already read in the papers; except that she added one thing, and a most important thing. She had not only heard her husband's voice at the telephone, but she had also

distinctly caught the words: "*Is that you, May?*"

There was no doubt that this admission produced a distinct impression, not to say a sensation, on everybody present. Who was May? Was she the same woman who had called up earlier on that fatal evening? Was Trask expecting a call from her, or did he only recognise the voice? In either case, had he not lied to his wife when he declared that he had no idea who the woman, who had so urgently desired to speak to him that she could not wait until morning to call him up at his office, was? One had only to look at his widow's face to know that she had asked herself all these questions—and had answered them.

There was little more to her testimony except to state that she, herself, saw that the safe was opened and that the money which Glover had placed there was missing.

Glover's testimony also closely followed the lines of his published interview. But he, too, added one detail which was interesting and served only to make the case against Strickland more

black, giving added support to the theory that he had come to the house originally with the purpose of robbery. With that fact established, there would be no trouble in establishing the motive of the murder.

When the secretary finally found the card he was searching for in Strickland's pocket, Strickland had snatched it from his hand, and had partly torn this incriminating piece of evidence before Glover succeeded in repossessing himself of it. I had to admit that that looked very bad indeed. I could see the effect that would have on a jury. It certainly was a very damning piece of evidence. It gave my own theory of the case a severe jolt. Also, I had waited to hear if Mrs. Trask had remembered to ask her husband for the new combination as she had intended doing. Still, I thought I knew the reason she had for not mentioning it if she had.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. STRICKLAND DISAPPEARS

DOUBTLESS the reader, if any such there be, who has been good enough to follow my halting narrative thus far will not be surprised to learn that by the end of the inquest my interest in the Trask murder, or rather, to speak more accurately, my interest in the case from the point of view of Strickland, had reached the point where I had resolved to be present at the time when he should be formally charged with the crime and indicted and offer my services as assistant to whatever counsel he should select.

I had little doubt that my offer would be accepted. I have said that I had the reputation for being an eccentric on account of practising my profession without the expectation of a fee. But as I never in any sense entered into competition with those that did so, I was confident that I had long ago extracted, so to speak, the poison from the barb of criticism.

I think that I may in all modesty say that it

was generally admitted that what I may have lacked in native ability was balanced by my willingness to give my whole time and attention to any case upon which I was engaged without sparing myself. I don't think any one ever accused me of a lack of industry. And after all, in the practice of law, as in any other branch of human endeavour, industry is a factor which counts.

Having gone over in my mind the list of criminal lawyers at the New York bar, all of whom, except perhaps some of the younger men, I knew and was known to personally, I could think of no one who would be apt to decline the offer of my personal services in a subordinate capacity. The fact that Strickland was just beginning to get once more upon his feet financially, would surely not debar him from obtaining the best legal assistance. A man who had, up to the time of the present catastrophe, enjoyed the best of reputations, could not fail to have friends who would stand behind him in his hour of sore need.

Judge of my astonishment, therefore, when I discovered that he had engaged no counsel what-

ever. But before I come to that, let me give my impressions of the man as I first saw him.

He sat at a small table withdrawn a few feet from that occupied by the reporters. His shattered arm, bandaged, and in a sling, rested on the table before him. From time to time, he eased it by placing his right hand under his elbow. He must have been suffering intense physical pain. In spite of the strong restraint that he was evidently putting on himself, occasionally a groan escaped him. But it would have been equally apparent to the most careless observer that his physical agony was nothing compared with the mental torture he was undergoing. The havoc which the hours that had passed since the night of the murder had wrought was amazing. One did not need to have known him before—as I had not—to realise that.

Before the shipwreck of all that gives a value to life, he must have been a man of unusual health and vigour. His well-knit, well-nourished frame could belong only to a man of regular and temperate habits. I guessed him to be in the early forties, and I have no doubt that he had

looked even younger. Now, he might have been almost any age. He sat huddled in his chair, leaning on the table. From time to time, he took deep sobbing breaths which seemed to wrack his whole frame. During the brief proceedings involving the formality of his arraignment, he only altered his position once, and only once did I see him fully open his eyes; that was when the officer in charge of him nudged him to remind him that he must stand up.

I have seen, in my time, many men bowed with misery and despair. But I have never looked upon a human being so completely crushed with misery as Robert Strickland that day, and for many days after. I sincerely hope I never may again!

When, on being reminded, he rose to his feet to plead to the indictment, he did an extraordinary thing. At the time I thought that he could not possibly realise what he was doing. In a broken voice he pleaded guilty, and declared himself ready to suffer the consequences. He declared that he had engaged no one to defend him, and that he didn't want to be defended. At first

glance, it seemed only reasonable to suppose that the man had lost his reason, or, at least had decided to sham insanity.

It is needless to say that justice does not permit of any man being undefended, nor of his pleading guilty. The plea of "not guilty" was entered for him, and His Honour did me the honour of appointing me counsel for his defence, which is how I came to be finally connected with the Strickland case in an official capacity.

I will never forget my first interview with my unwilling client in his cell in the Tombs. It was well that I was a seasoned lawyer, and well, too, that I have an underlying strata of obstinacy in my character almost—I say "almost" advisedly—equalling Strickland's own. A younger man would have thrown up the case in despair. A less obstinate man would have abandoned it in disgust. I did neither; although I confess that more than once my patience and my temper were sorely tried.

But in the midst of his own suffering, and in the face of his unconquerable resolution to say no word that would assist in his defence, he main-

tained the courtesy of a well-bred man. He never forgot a certain deference to me as an elder man. He was invariably polite. He frequently expressed himself as being grateful to me for proferring my services. He spoke of the regret that he felt for the trouble he was causing me. But, nevertheless, he flatly refused to help me in any way. He was guilty. He had no desire to escape punishment. The day that he would be called upon to expiate his crime could not come too soon. He was positively childish in his protestations that he couldn't see why he should have to endure the formality of a trial. What for? He had pleaded guilty. He *was* guilty. Why could they not sentence him to death without all this red tape? No one who heard him could doubt that he was sincere in his wish.

I could learn nothing from him that was of the slightest aid. On all points pertaining to the events of the night on which he had been taken in the Trask house, he maintained an obstinate, unbreakable silence. The effect of this extraordinary conduct, while it did not alter my determination to defend him as best I might, was to

convince me that both McLean and myself had been in error in one matter at least. There *had* been another man present. Strickland must be shielding some one. Who else could he be shielding? And of what nature was the tie that bound these two men together that one of them should be willing to go to death—and a disgraceful death—to shield the other?

Finding that threats, entreaties, and logic were alike unavailing—I had, of course, not neglected to appeal to him on behalf of his wife and child; and, while he showed himself more nearly vulnerable on being attacked on that side than on any other—I decided to leave him alone for the time being. A few hours' reflection in the quiet of my own house, and—yes, I admit it—the prospect of a debate over the whole matter with McLean, could not fail to inspire me with fresh courage and perhaps a supply of fresh ideas. I do not in the least mind confessing that I felt the need of both.

I left my recalcitrant client lying on the cot in his cell and departed in a more perturbed frame of mind than I liked to think possible. I was

able to glean only one faint bit of consolation from the whole situation. McLean would be bitterly disappointed to find that he—I did not say we—was wrong in regarding the so-called accomplice as a mythical personage. He *must* have existed. There was no other way to explain Strickland's attitude. And the accomplice once admitted, what became of the theory that it was Mrs. Trask who had robbed the safe?

It was palpably absurd to suppose that Strickland had brought the other man with him to help him attack an unarmed man. Could it be that the safe had contained anything else—say compromising or incriminating letters—that he had wanted? I still refused to entertain the idea that he was a common, vulgar thief, in the sense that he had come for the money.

I determined to dismiss the whole matter from my mind, at least until I reached home. Inspired by the example of a young man who seemed to be reading his paper with absorbed interest while waiting on the subway platform for his train, I also bought the same paper. A glance over his shoulder told me that he was deeply en-

grossed in what I believe is called the "Sporting Page." I devoted myself to the same page until I arrived at my station. If it had been printed in a foreign language, I would have understood just about as much of it. As a complete rest to the mind, I found it had many things to recommend it. And yet I presume that there are people who read it with understanding and satisfaction!

Once home, I went at once to my room to prepare for dinner. I had planned to surprise McLean with the news that I had been appointed Strickland's counsel. But I found that he was already acquainted with the fact which was in all the evening papers. It certainly was not on the "Sporting Page." To that I could swear!

I had had ample time to go carefully over my unsatisfactory interview with my client before McLean was at leisure to come to me in my study as I had told him to do. Rather to my surprise he accepted my altered view on the subject of the accomplice. But he stubbornly refused to admit that such an admission was tantamount to exonerating Mrs. Trask from the charge of having taken the money herself. He was honest enough

to admit that for the moment he was completely puzzled.

Nor could he fathom the reason why Strickland should go such lengths to screen the other man. "There's only one person in the world who can explain that," he said.

"The other man, I suppose," I jeered.

"Not at all; Mrs. Strickland."

For a long moment I stared at him.

"Get my hat and stick, will you? I'll go at once. Strickland's flat was somewhere in the fifties, wasn't it?"

"Fifty-eighth Street. The address was in one of the papers. I'll look up the number."

He left the room to return presently with the address written on a card.

"I'm obliged to you," I said. And he knew that I didn't mean for the address alone.

The house was an easy one to find. To judge from its appearance it was an old one, but the windows were all handsomely curtained, and it suggested, somehow, that the rooms would all be large and spacious.

"Could you tell me if Mrs. Robert Strickland

is home?" I asked of a respectable looking coloured boy who stood in the doorway.

For some reason or other, he seemed slightly embarrassed.

"If you'll wait a minute, sir, I'll ask Bertha. She was Mrs. Strickland's maid. She's down in the janitress' flat now."

I was puzzled by his manner. And why "was"? If Bertha were no longer Mrs. Strickland's maid, what would she know about her movements? In a moment he returned with a good-looking girl whom I judged to be a German.

"That's the gentleman that was asking," he said by way of introduction, and politely withdrew some distance down the hall, although I could see that he was burning with curiosity as to my errand.

"You wanted to see Mrs. Strickland?" enquired Bertha with a troubled air.

"Yes. Can you tell me if she is at home, and if she can see me? It's very important."

"Would you give me your name, sir?"

"Certainly. I am Mr. Arbuckle; Mr. Malcolm Arbuckle."

Bertha's face lightened in a most flattering manner.

"Oh, sir! Then you're the gentleman who is going to get the master out of his trouble!" she said enthusiastically. Evidently all the world knew of the new responsibility I had assumed—except those who confined themselves to the "Sporting Page"!

"Yes, I am Mr. Strickland's lawyer."

"And did *he* send you over to see Mrs. Strickland?" she asked, the troubled look returning.

I was beginning to be annoyed.

"No, he did not. But is that any reason for her not seeing me? She can give me a great deal of information that I will need in my defence of Mr. Strickland."

To my surprise, the girl burst into tears.

"Oh, sir," she sobbed. "I only wish I could tell you how to see her. She's gone!"

"Gone!" I echoed. "What do you mean?"

"Gone. Left the house. She even left Miss Doris without a word. The poor little thing stayed alone with me here for three days, and then I took her up to her aunt's."

"Doris? Is that Mr. Strickland's little girl?"

"Yes, sir." She had regained some of her composure by now, and was drying her eyes on a large handkerchief.

"But *when* did Mrs. Strickland leave, and where is she now?"

"I wish I could tell you, sir. I mean I wish I could tell you where she was. None of us know. Her own sister doesn't know. No one has seen her since that night."

"What night?" I asked in growing excitement.

"The night—the night that Mr. Trask—died."

I liked the way that the faithful creature refused to use the word that was in everybody's mouth, the word "murdered." Evidently she was devoted to both her master and mistress.

"Bertha," I said, taking her kindly by the arm, "this is most important. Just when did Mrs. Strickland leave the house, and how? Did she go alone?"

"She must have gone soon after Mr. Strickland did, and I'm sure she went alone. There was no one here for her to have gone with. I had gone to bed, and I wouldn't have known anything

about her going if it hadn't been that Miss Doris was so frightened and came crying to my room. The poor child had, of course, gone to bed long before. But something had awakened and frightened her. She told me that her mother had been crying and saying terrible things. And that she had been telephoning to some one, and that something she had heard over the telephone had made her mother scream. And that she had taken her in her arms and kissed her so hard that it hurt her. And had said 'Good-bye,' and had gone running out of the door. And that her father wasn't in his room so that he must have gone, too."

"Bertha," I asked, "do you happen to know what Mrs. Strickland's name was? I mean, do you know what Mr. Strickland called her?"

"Yes, sir. He always called her 'May.' "

I drew a long breath, and waited a minute.

"And you say that you took Miss Doris up to her aunt's? Can you give me the address, and the aunt's name?"

"Yes, sir. She's a Mrs. Stanwood, and she's a widow."

I wrote the name down with the address.

"And now, Bertha, one thing more. How could I reach you if I wanted to see you again to ask you any more questions? Or"—seeing that she looked troubled—"if I should have any news of Mrs. Strickland?"

"Oh, sir, do you think you will? Sometimes, I'm afraid"—here she looked as if she were about to cry again—"that no one will ever see her again."

"Nonsense!" I said, with a confidence that I was far from feeling. "But how can I let you know if I do have some news?"

"There's no place better than here, sir. Of course, I'll have to look out for another place. The rent's paid on Mr. Strickland's flat until the fifteenth of the month. But I just can't bear to stay here nights. But I am here all day in case *she* should come back. Oh, thank you, sir!"

I slipped something into the devoted creature's hand.

"Then this address will find you until after the fifteenth?"

"Yes, sir, and even after that. The janitress will keep any letters that come for me."

"Very well. Good night."

"Good night, sir, and thank you."

I was surprised to find myself at my own door. I had been so taken up with my thoughts on the way home that I seemed to have covered the distance in no time.

I imparted my great news to McLean.

"McLean, it seems that Mrs. Strickland's Christian name is May."

The information left him cold. And yet he had heard that name at the inquest.

"And what did she have to say about the other man? Have you found out the reason why Strickland's keeping so dark about him?"

"She didn't say anything about him, for the best of reasons. She has disappeared."

McLean made a sound that strongly resembled a whistle. "Disappeared? When?" he asked.

"The night of the murder, of course. Good night to you." And I started up the stairs to bed.

"And her name is May!" I heard him exclaim

softly to himself, as he made his way to his own part of the house.

I felt convinced that he considered me ungrateful. I had a guilty feeling that he was justified. I needn't have said "of course"!

CHAPTER V

I BUY A GIFT FOR DORIS

WHILE I was dressing the next morning, I was planning my visit to Mrs. Stanwood and speculating as to how I was to set about making friends with Doris. I am fond of children—at least I think I would be, if I were more accustomed to them. But I admit that I always am terribly embarrassed to know how one begins with them, so to speak. I am handicapped by having practically no childish recollections of my own to draw upon. I was, I realise now that it is too late, a singularly solitary child myself. I never had any playmates of my own. Still, the ice once broken, I rather flatter myself that I have “a way” with little people. I was great friends at one time with the small son of one of my colleagues. Bless me, how time flies! Tom is grown up and married, and has children of his own now. But somehow I fancied that I would find it harder to get to know a little girl.

By the time I was ready for breakfast, I had

decided on the first step. I must take the child some little gift. Children always liked presents. Probably girls liked them even more than boys. The next question was what sort of thing to take. I turned to McLean.

"McLean, do you—do you know any children?"

"Know any children?" repeated McLean stupidly.

"That's what I asked." And as he still stood looking at me, I added, with a touch of irritation,

"Good heavens, man! There must be some children in this neighbourhood!"

"There are," said McLean with emphasis, "and too many of them. If I don't know *them*, I promise you they know *me*."

I recalled that McLean had complained at the police station about some boys who had broken a window in his basement while playing ball, and decided to try another tack.

"Haven't you any nephews, or nieces, or small cousins, or anything?"

"I have two nieces," he admitted grudgingly.

I felt greatly cheered. "And how old are they?"

"One of them is nearly fifty. She was my oldest brother's child. There was twelve of us. I was the tenth."

"And how old is the other one?" I asked with diminishing hope.

"Two weeks, sir."

This, evidently, was a matter in which McLean could be of no assistance.

Before starting for 84th Street, where Mrs. Stanwood lived, I went down town to one of the most reliable toy shops. No doubt some of the clerks would be able to advise me. It was stupid not to have thought of that before. I selected a pleasant-faced man who looked old enough to be sensible.

"I—I am looking for a small present for a child, a girl. I thought perhaps you could help me in making a selection."

But his first question floored me. "Certainly, sir. How old is she?"

"I don't exactly know. The ordinary age, I should say."

His look suggested that I had said something foolish.

"I mean to say that I haven't any idea. But I don't think she can be over three or four."

Why I had decided on that age I would have been rather put to it to explain. He assured me that there were a number of things to choose from. I finally selected a picture book, filled with pictures of domestic animals and with what I took to be explanatory notes in type so large that I could read it at arm's length without my glasses. To this I added, entirely on the advice of the clerk, a large tin horn. I mildly suggested that I thought the latter selection more appropriate for a small boy. But he assured me that small girls were even more fond of making noise than small boys. I wanted to ask him how he knew. But I didn't.

With these purchases, neatly done up in two separate packages, I started upon my important errand. The hall attendant having telephoned up a garbled paraphrase of my name, I presently found myself ushered into a pleasant drawing-room, by a respectable-looking, elderly maid to

whom I presented my card. It was a comfort to know that she could not change that. A moment later, Mrs. Stanwood was with me.

She had been a pretty woman once, I could see that. I also decided that she was probably much younger than she looked. She was evidently in poor health, as she walked with the feeble step of an old woman. Her eyes had that washed out look of a woman who has wept too much. Just now, however, I would have said that she was suffering more from fright than grief. She held out her hand to me without a word.

"Mrs. Stanwood—" I began.

"Yes, I know. I saw it in the paper. You are Mr. Strickland's lawyer."

"Then you know why I have come."

She sank into the nearest chair, and began to lock and unlock her hands nervously.

"I can be of no help to you, none at all. I would do anything I could if I thought it could possibly help my—Mr. Strickland. But there is nothing I could say that would not make matters worse. I suppose he has told you—"

"He has told me nothing," I interrupted.



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“My daddy brought him to me from Cleveland the night
he came home”

"Not a word of any kind can I get out of him. He insists that he is guilty and that is all there is to it."

For a moment her face lost its look of deadly apprehension. "That is like Robert, that is like Robert!" she repeated. "Oh, I'm so glad. It is like him to think of Doris. Not that the child's life is not ruined as it is! I can tell you nothing," she said again.

"But I wasn't expecting you to tell me anything that would help me in my defence of Mr. Strickland—that is, not directly. I was only hoping that through you I might be able to find Mrs. Strickland."

For a moment she buried her face in her hands. When she looked up, her face was still wet with tears.

"I know nothing about her. I didn't even know that she had disappeared until Bertha came up here bringing Doris. Bertha thinks that she is—is dead. But I have still one hope, not much of one, I admit. Still, if she had no money, it would take a long time to get there," she said more to herself than to me.

“How do you know she had no money?”

“Because Bertha brought me her purse which she found lying on the table. It was the one she usually carried when she was shopping. It had thirty dollars in it, and some loose change. She never would have kept her money in two purses; that is, no amount to speak of. She might have had a little change in some other one. But she left without ever thinking of the money, I am sure.”

“And you still think that she may have gone somewhere where she is known?”

“If I didn’t think so, I should go mad!” she exclaimed, almost violently. Then, recovering herself with a strong effort, she went on. “You see I was only just beginning to recover from a terrible illness, an illness of nearly a year. I have only been out of bed a little over a month. When I read this fearful thing in the paper, I was completely prostrated. I was only half conscious for several days. And then Bertha came with more terrible news.”

“Are you willing to tell me where you think Mrs. Strickland may have gone?”

She shook her head. "Not now. It wouldn't do any good. I will only say that it is a place in the country. Years ago, after May had had a great shock, she was ill there for a long, long time. I have a feeling that another shock, which would remind her so of the first one, would have the effect of sending her back there again. Indeed, once before, when she was ill again, just before Doris was born, she disappeared. It was there we found her. But that time she had taken some money with her. Now—it is such a long way! If only she has the strength to get there, it will be all right. The people know her."

"Mrs. Stanwood, why are you keeping so much back from me?"

"Because, you must believe me, it would only make matters worse if I told you."

"Will you answer me this question: Do you think that Robert Strickland went to Trask's house to get that money?"

"Never!" Her face flushed with indignation.

"Then his motive for killing Gerald Trask had nothing to do with that ten thousand dollars?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Where is Doris? May I see her?"

She hesitated a moment. "I don't see what possible good it can do," she said. "But there is no reason you shouldn't. Of course, you understand that she only knows that her father and mother have gone away? She is a curious child, far older than her years. She is more like her father than her mother. She has her father's taste for mathematics. If she had been a boy, I am sure she would have been interested in engineering as he is."

I thought with alarm of the picture book with its large print, and of the horn lying on the floor beside me. Mrs. Stanwood rose and touched the electric button.

"Tell Miss Doris I would like to see her," she said to the respectable-looking maid.

"One question before the child comes," I said. "Did you read the account of the inquest?"

Again she clasped and unclasped her hands. Her lips formed the word "No," although no sound came from them.

"Then you didn't know that Mrs. Trask testi-

fied that the last thing she heard her husband say before he recognised Mr. Strickland, was while he was at the telephone, and that the words were: *'Is that you, May'?*"

She gave a sort of stifled scream. For a moment I thought that she was going to faint. Her face, pale as it was, grew paler, with a sort of grey pallor. I sprang from my chair, and went over toward her. But she waved me away. Her will power was nothing short of astonishing. She gave a long shuddering breath. "I told you I had nothing to say."

But she had answered me, nevertheless.

A child's step came running down the hall. It was Doris. When I saw her, I leaned down and shoved my two parcels under the chair in which I was sitting. It was covered with light coloured material, as was all the upholstered furniture, giving the room a bright, summer-like air. I had noticed that the chair in which I was sitting had a deep ruffly sort of thing at the bottom. Why I did such a foolish thing, I don't know. I was weak enough to act on the impulse of the moment. The moment I laid eyes on her, I could

have blushed when I thought of that wretched tin horn.

Not that Doris was anything but a child, but, as her aunt had said, she looked older than her years. And besides, as I learned later, she was nearly nine years old. And I had told the clerk in the toy store that she couldn't be more than four! She was uncommonly tall for her age. Whether it was because she was not quite happy in her strange surroundings and merely missed her parents, or whether it was that she really understood far more than her aunt was disposed to think, of the occurrences of the night when she had last seen them, her face and manner had a gravity and seriousness sad to see in so young a child.

She had evidently been carefully brought up, for, when her aunt said: "Doris, I want you to go over and shake hands with Mr. Arbuckle. He is a friend of your father's," she came over to me, and making me the prettiest courtesy imaginable, put her little hand in mine. Under one arm she carried a quaint little doll, dressed like a little German boy.

"Are you a friend of my daddy's?" she asked eagerly. "Have you seen him since the night"—for a moment her lip quivered, and the tears brimmed into her dark eyes—"since the night he and my mamma went away? And do you know when he is coming to take me back home?"

"You see, Mr. Arbuckle, she doesn't like to stay with her aunt at all," said Mrs. Stanwood, with an attempt to divert Doris' thoughts.

"Oh, no, Aunt Helen, I *do* like to stay with you," said the child, running over to her aunt's side. "Only," she added frankly, "I like to be in my own home with my mamma and daddy best. I love to come up and spend the day here, as I often do. But I *do* want to go home again! Do you know when my daddy is coming for me?" she repeated.

"I can't quite tell you that," I said. "But I know he'll come as soon as he can. Your father hurt his arm quite badly the other day. But I am going to help him as much as I can. I came to see you because maybe you can help me to help him."

"Oh, can I?" she cried delightedly. And then she added: "Are you a doctor?"

"No," I said, "I'm not a doctor. But I think I can help him in another way. But there are some things I want to ask you about. Will you try to answer my questions like a good little girl?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

Whether Mrs. Stanwood thought that I might make more progress if I had the child alone to myself, or whether she did not feel equal to remaining to hear the questions she feared I might ask, I do not know. At all events she rose to leave the room.

"If you will excuse me, I think I must go and lie down again," she said. "But first I would like to say just a word to you. Doris, will you run out and ask Margaret to get my broth ready?"

The child ran away, and Mrs. Stanwood turned to me.

"What do you expect to get by questioning Doris?" she asked.

"I hardly know. But I am hoping that she can tell me something of the occurrences at her

home the night Trask was shot. He went there, you know, on his way home from the station."

"To see Robert," she said hastily.

"Certainly. To see him. Strickland had telegraphed for him to come."

"It was the maddest thing to do. I don't understand it."

"Why, it seems to me to be perfectly simple."

"That is because *you* don't understand."

"I know. But I want to. Mrs. Stanwood, don't you want to give Robert Strickland a chance for his life?"

"What chance has he? Besides, I have already told you that anything that I might say would do him far more harm than good."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Positive."

"Do you object to my questioning Doris?"

"No. Only I do not believe it can do any possible good. Have you told her father that you were coming?"

"No, I haven't. As a matter of fact, I hadn't thought of the child until after I left him and found that Mrs. Strickland was gone."

"But you had told him that you were going to see his wife?"

"No. But, remember, it is a matter of life and death. Strickland is evidently trying to shield some one—the other man perhaps. As he will not open his lips, some one else must."

"Then you place life above everything? Above honour, even?"

"I cannot connect Strickland with anything that is dishonourable."

"You are right," she said, holding out her hand. "Whatever dishonour is back of all this is not his. But I warn you that he will suffer worse things than death. I do not understand it all myself. There is much that seems to me incredible. If only May had not vanished as she has. One word with her, and I would know what I ought to do. And now I will send Doris to you again. I no longer object to your asking her what you will."

With that, she left me alone.

"Come, Doris," I said, as the child came slowly back into the room, "won't you come over and sit

here by me on the sofa? Then we can have a good long talk and be quite comfortable."

"What an odd looking dolly," I began. "You seem to be very fond of him."

"I like him better than all my other dolls. He's German, and his name is Hermann. My daddy brought him to me from Cleveland the night he came home. Do you know, Mr. Arbuckle, when we are going there? You knew we were all going there to live. My daddy has got a house there. A nice white house with a garden and lots of flowers, and, oh, yes, a dog!"

"Yes, I knew that you were going. But I didn't know about the house. Who told you about that?"

"Daddy did; the night he came home."

"That's what I want to hear about; all about the night he came home. Did he come after your bedtime?"

"He came after my *regular* bedtime. But Mamma let me sit up later because I hadn't seen my daddy for ever so long. And then I'd been a good girl and passed all my examinations at

school. I was promoted. I'm in the Grammar school now."

"Good gracious, you don't say so! Why, you must know lots about all sorts of things!"

"I'm afraid I don't," admitted Doris reluctantly. "You see, I'm so much better at arithmetic than at anything else. I just can't forget numbers, and I just can't remember lots of other things which the teacher says are just as important."

"So you remember numbers, do you? Do you remember dates, too?"

"Yes, I remember dates. But I remember other sorts of numbers better. My daddy says I know all of his telephone numbers better than he does. He never has to look in the book except for new ones when I'm 'round."

"That must be a great help to him. But, now, tell me about the night he came home. What were you doing while you were waiting for him to come from the station?"

"Oh, I did lots of things. I played 'round a while; and then I practised some scales on the piano until I remembered that Mamma was lying

down resting; and then I played a while with my dolls; and, oh, yes"—she gave a merry, childish laugh—"I had all of my dolls—I've got lots of them—playing tea-party round the corner back of the lounge. And when Mamma came in to telephone to 4000 Jersey City, about the purse that she had lost at Long Branch—"

"A purse she had lost at Long Branch?"

I could have bitten my tongue out. Doris turned to me with a sort of troubled look.

"Go on, dear child. I didn't mean to interrupt you."

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you or not. I promised Mamma that I wouldn't tell Daddy for fear it might worry him. But then he knew all about it afterwards when the man from Long Branch brought it back."

"But what were you going to say about when your mamma came in to telephone and you were playing there with your dollies?"

"Oh, yes!" Again Doris was overcome with mirth. "I frightened her. You see, she didn't know I was there. And after she had finished telephoning, and I came up to ask her if it was

her nice, soft, little black purse she had lost, she screamed and said: 'Doris! Where did you come from?' And then she told me all about lending her purse to a friend who hadn't any money. My mamma's purse had lots of money. She told the man at the telephone that it had about forty dollars in it. And some addresses written on cards that she didn't want to lose."

"And a friend of hers had lost it at Long Branch?"

"Well, I don't just understand about that. She told the man at the telephone that she had lost it at Long Branch, and then she told me that it was a friend who had lost it. And when I asked her if it wasn't fibbing to tell the man that she had lost it when it was her friend who had, she said she'd explain that to me some other time. And besides she had been shopping all that day to get ready to go to Cleveland. That's why she sent me up to spend the day here with Aunt Helen. But later on, after I had gone to bed in the next room—I didn't want to go to bed. I just knew I wouldn't go to sleep for the longest



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“I just knew I wouldn’t go to sleep for the longest while”

while! I was too excited at seeing Daddy again—I heard the man come that found the purse, and then Mamma remembered that she had been to Long Branch after all. Wasn't it funny she forgot?"

"Yes, indeed. Did you hear the name of the man who found the purse?"

"Yes, sir. But I don't remember it."

"Would you know it, if you heard it?"

"I don't know."

"It wasn't a Mr. Trask?"

"Oh, do you know Mr. Trask? He was nice to Hermann. He asked him how he liked America. No, of course it wasn't Mr. Trask."

"He was nice to Hermann?" I was frankly puzzled.

"Yes, to Hermann here." She held up the German doll.

"Oh, I see."

"You see, Daddy had just brought Hermann home to me, and while I was sitting on his lap telling him all about what I had been doing while he was gone, Mr. Trask came to see him. And

when Daddy said to him: 'This is Doris,' he asked me what Hermann's name was, and I told him."

"Was your mamma there when Mr. Trask came?"

"No, sir. She was helping Bertha get Daddy some supper. He hadn't had any."

"Then she didn't see him at all?"

"Not till a long time after he came. They talked ever so long. I guess it was about some business. My mamma didn't come in until just as Mr. Trask was going away."

"They weren't—they weren't angry about anything, were they?"

"Oh, my, no! Mr. Trask gave Daddy a piece of paper all folded up. And Daddy said he was mighty glad to get it. And then he gave Mr. Trask some money. And while they were talking, Daddy took the paper that Mr. Trask had given him and tore the corner off it. Wasn't it funny, when he said he was 'mighty glad to get it'? I guess he wasn't thinking of what he was doing. I wanted to stop him, but I was afraid."

to interrupt them. And then Mr. Trask asked him to come with him fishing on Sunday. And he wrote the place where he lived on a card and gave it to him. I didn't want him to go away so soon again. So I was glad when Mamma said she didn't want him to go, either."

"Did she say why she didn't want him to go?"

"She said she didn't like the idea of his going out in one of those boats."

"Oh. And what did Mr. Trask say to that?"

"Oh, he'd gone away then. Mamma came in just as he was going. And Daddy said: 'I want you to meet Mr. Trask, May,' and he was sorry Mr. Trask had to hurry away. He said he wanted them to know each other."

"And then?"

"And then, they sent me to bed."

"But you say you didn't go to sleep at once. You heard the man come who brought back your mamma's purse? Did you hear anything else?"

The child's whole expression changed. A look

of fear came into her eyes. Her lips quivered.

"Oh, please, please don't ask me to tell anything more. I can't! I can't! It frightens me to remember. I cry most every night when I go to bed, for I can't *help* thinking of it. But I try not to let Aunt Helen hear me!"

I saw that I had better not press her further for the present. Besides I had enough to go on. I must try and find who had brought back the missing purse. "All right, my dear, we won't talk any more about it just now. Tell me, what do you do all day, now that school is over? Have you any playmates? Any other little girls you know?"

"No, sir. But when Margaret isn't too busy, Aunt Helen lets her go with me out to the Drive. But that isn't very often, 'cause Margaret's too busy," she explained mournfully.

"Well, I think we can fix that. I must be out of town to-morrow. But suppose I come up the following morning? I think your Aunt Helen would let you go out with me. And you can show me all the prettiest places on the Drive. I don't know it at all."

"Don't know Riverside Drive? How funny!" laughed Doris.

I was glad to see that I had been able to divert her attention from the recollections that frightened her. I felt like a brute, to torture a child as I must later on. But the story of what had occurred later that night, I must and would have. If I put it on the ground that in telling me she was going to help her beloved Daddy, which was indeed the truth, it would make it easier for us both.

Having asked Doris to present my compliments to her aunt, and to say that I hoped to see her again within a day or two, I took my departure, my mind fully occupied with the missing purse. Was it the same purse that Bertha had brought to Mrs. Stanwood? Probably. But it had had only thirty dollars in it, and, if Doris' accurate memory for numbers could be relied upon, her mother had said over the telephone that it contained about forty. I rather pique myself upon being a judge of character. I was sure, from seeing her the once, that Bertha was honest. How stupid I was becoming! McLean would have

done better! The reward, of course. Mrs. Strickland must have given it to the man who returned it.

I was half way home when I remembered those wretched parcels under the chair!

CHAPTER VI

I MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MR. BURKE

FATE decreed that I should find it impossible to keep my promise to Doris. I found myself obliged to postpone our outing for another day. But by way of apology, I had, together with the note explaining that some important matters connected with the case would necessitate a change of plan addressed to her aunt, forwarded to the child a handsome female doll dressed in the most approved German fashion, which I suggested might be a companion for Hermann in his exile.

I had added an explanation of the mysterious bundles which could be found under the chair in the drawing-room, and had begged that their contents might be disposed of in whatever manner would most commend itself to Mrs. Stanwood. McLean brought an agreeable note in reply. Doris was delighted with her doll. She was looking forward to initiating me into the unknown beauties of Riverside Drive. And the janitor

happened to have an infant of a suitable age to enjoy the toys I had originally designed for her niece. So that was satisfactorily settled.

I had, of course, paid my client another visit. If I had had any hope of finding him more communicative, I would have been doomed to disappointment. I was glad to find that his arm seemed to be giving him less pain. I did not mention having seen Doris, or the matter of the purse. As a leverage, I thought either piece of information would have been of doubtful value. As a matter of form, I urged him once more to give me some help in building up his defence. His only reply was to remind me that he did not wish to be defended.

Relying on Doris' boasted accuracy in regard to figures, I telephoned to the Jersey City number to find, as I had surmised, that I was connected with the Lost Articles Clerk. He knew nothing of any purse lost by a Mrs. Robert Strickland. He was disposed to cavil at my rather vague description of it, but accepted my explanation that I was acting for a friend. No, nothing at all like

it had been turned in. Did he recall Mrs. Strickland having telephoned in person the night of June 24th? No, he did not. He couldn't be supposed to remember the names of all the people that called him up. His manner implied that he wouldn't have told me if he had.

The next step, naturally, was to go to Long Branch. Judging that the station-master would be the best person to address myself to, I went at once in search of him. As it chanced to be his dinner hour, I debated whether I should take a stroll along the beach, or wait where I was until his return. Chance decided me, and for once, the Jade seemed to have wished to do me a good turn.

There was a large news-stand at the station, presided over by a pleasant looking, honest-faced Irishman who had arrived at that period of life which the French tactfully allude to as "between two ages." I took to him at once. Explaining that I was waiting for the absent station agent, I asked permission to glance over his stock in the hope of finding something to assist me in passing the time. Having confessed my weakness in the

matter of detective stories and mystery tales, Mr. Burke—it was later on that he told me his name—admitted a like infirmity.

Having so swiftly and felicitously established a common interest, conversation became easy. I confessed that I followed the criminal branch of the law professionally, which at once brought us to the Trask murder, in which it turned out—again, I pay my respects to the goddess of Chance—that Mr. Burke had a peculiar, almost intimate interest.

Having accepted his invitation to come inside and take a chair, I soon found myself comfortably seated in a corner with my back to the platform. Mr. Burke seated himself opposite me, where he could keep his sharp eye out for any potential customer, although he admitted that at this particular hour there was no great likelihood of our being interrupted. It is needless to remark that I devoutly hoped that we might not be. I was beginning to have a suspicion, from my host's impressive manner, that I had stumbled upon the very man I was looking for.

“Do you know, sir,” said Mr. Burke leaning

forward, his hands on his knees, that *I* was at the Strickland house only a few hours before the murder was committed?" I expressed unbounded astonishment.

"And," continued Mr. Burke, "you could have knocked me down with a feather when I read about it in the papers. Him commit a murder! Why, I'd as soon of thought of—of myself doin' it! If they'd have come down the next day and arrested me for it, I wouldn't have been more surprised, believe me. And yet it looks like he did it—if I ain't asking an improper question."

"Yes, it looks as if he did," I admitted. "In fact he declares himself that he did."

"Yes, I see that, too," nodded Mr. Burke. "Why," he broke out afresh, "a kinder, pleasanter-spoken gentleman you wouldn't come across in a day's journey! He was that agreeable to me, and he was as patient with her. And she acted awful funny. First, she hadn't lost it. No, she wouldn't hear of it. And there were her callin'-cards inside, half a dozen of 'em. And I've heard since that she had been telephonin' all over the place about it, too. She had the very station

master you're lookin' for on the line twice. It beats me!"

"But you forget you haven't told me what it was, or how you happened to call at the house."

"That's just like me!" laughed Mr. Burke. "I never could tell a story right. I always begin in the middle and work back to the beginnin'. Besides, I'm extra excited over this. It's all so damned queer. And him a murderer! Well, I'll take a fresh start, and if there's anything you don't understand because I'm leavin' it out, sing out."

I promised to "sing out," and Mr. Burke began.

"It was this way. Things was pretty brisk just before the 4.17 train pulled out. There was a whole lot of people who happened to be goin' up to the city by it that day."

"Just a moment: what day was it? Do you remember?"

"Sure. June the 23rd. The day before the murder. As I was sayin', there was an unusual crowd of people goin' to town for some reason or other, and I was pretty busy tendin' to 'em. After the train had pulled out, I happened to

come out from behind here to go over and say something to one of the boys. And right there, lyin' on the platform in plain sight, was one of them little bags that the women folks carry. It was close down to the tracks, as if some one had dropped it just as they was gettin' into the train.

"Well, first thing I thought I'd hand it into the office. And then the idea come to me, that I'd look inside of it first. And if there was anything valuable in it, why shouldn't yours truly get the reward. I didn't see no reason for dividin' it. I'd found it without any help. Was I right or wrong?"

"You were perfectly right," I assured him.

"Well, that's what I done, anyway. A local happened to come along just then, and I was busy again for a few minutes. When I got time to look at the thing, I see that it had money in it sure enough. I wasn't goin' to take any chances emptying it out here to see what there *was* in it. Time enough to do that after I shut up shop, when there'd be nobody round to butt in. There's an awful lot of rubberers round a railroad station. You wouldn't believe it!"

I tried to look my regretful surprise.

"After I'd put the shutters up, I locked the door. Then I emptied the thing on that box over there. First, I counted the money. There was thirty-eight dollars and seventy-five cents. Then I took a look at the other things. There was the usual amount of truck you would expect to find in a woman's purse. A veil, half-a-dozen hair-pins, some samples, and things like that. And there was three or four cards with her name on them. Mrs. Robert Strickland, and the address. You know what it was, I don't just remember now."

"Yes, I know."

"And there was a slip of paper with a Long Branch address written on it. I should say that it was in a man's handwritin'. Wait a bit, and I'll tell you. Now I have it. It was 206 Henderson Place. That's only about three blocks from here."

"Well, as that was considerable nearer for me than goin' to the New York address, I thought I'd take a look at it on the way home. But the house was all dark. I was a little later than

usual. It didn't look as if any one was sittin' up worryin'. So I made up my mind I'd go round the next day.

"The next day at the noon hour, when there wasn't much doin', I gave Tommy Jenkins ten cents to watch the stand for half an hour, and I hikes back to old 206. There was nobody there but an old woman who must have thought I was a porch climber or somethin' like that. She kept the door on the chain, and talked to me through the crack. She said she didn't know of any party by the name of Strickland. She was sure they didn't belong there. She wouldn't tell me who did live there when there was any person in the house. Said she had been alone there for ever so long. Finally she did admit that there had been a lady there the day before. But she didn't know her name. So there was nothing for me to do but go to the address on the card."

"One moment. Have you happened to hear who owned the house you went to?"

"Not yet. I haven't had time. But I'm goin' to, just out of curiosity."

I felt pretty sure I could have told him the name of the owner. But I didn't.

"So," continued Mr. Burke, "that same night—the night of the murder, mind you, I got off a little earlier, spruced up a little bit, and went up to the city myself. I found the house without any trouble, and went in and read all the names on the bells. Sure enough, the name of Strickland was there all right."

"One moment, Mr. Burke. Can you tell me what time that was?"

"There now!" said Mr. Burke in open admiration. "I just knew you'd ask that. And if I weren't a chump, I'd be able to tell you to the minute. But I can't, that is, exactly. But it couldn't have been long after half-past eight. I know I was on my way back down town when I looked at my watch to see if it was too late to go to a picture show or something. I thought as long as I had taken an evenin' off, I might as well amuse myself. Besides, didn't I have eight good bucks in my pocket that was all to the good?"

"Eight good what?"

"Bucks. Dollars. The reward, you know."

“Oh! They gave you eight dollars reward?”

“He did. After he’d counted the money, which was in three ten dollar bills, and the rest in twos and ones, he just rolled up the smaller bills and handed them to me. Oh, he’s a fine man, all right. And him gettin’ ready maybe then to commit a murder! But I’m gettin’ ahead of my story.

“Well, there was a nice lookin’ servant girl opened the door for me. And then I told her what I wanted and asked if a party by the name of Strickland was at home. ‘Mr. or Mrs. Strickland?’ she asks. I told her I guessed I wanted to see Mrs. Strickland. She asked me as pretty as you please to wait and she’d see. I heard a man’s voice ask: ‘Who’s Mr. Burke?’ And then a woman’s voice answered: ‘Why, I don’t know.’ Of course she didn’t. How could she? Then the pretty servant girl came back and asked me to come in.

“I went into a big room all furnished up like the rooms you see on the stage. There was a big, fine-lookin’ man there and as pretty a woman as you’d see in a day’s journey. The servant girl

looked pretty good to me till I saw the lady of the house. After that—" Mr. Burke made an eloquent gesture.

"They both was as polite as could be an' asked me to take a chair. But the woman had a sort of scared look in her eyes. It seemed to be up to me to make the first move. So I says: 'I found a purse that belongs to you, mum, I think.' Quick as a flash, the lady says: 'Robert dear, your dinner will be ready now; you had better go in before it gets cold.'

"But he didn't seem to be in any hurry. 'I can wait a few minutes longer,' he says, easy and pleasant like. 'I'll only take a minute, mum,' I says. 'I've come all the way from Long Branch.' 'Have you lost a purse, May?' he asks. 'Why, no; I don't think so,' says she. 'Are you sure, mum?' says I. She waited a minute before givin' me an answer. 'Positive,' says she. And all the time she looked as if she was beggin' me to go. I couldn't understand it.

" 'Where did you find the purse, Mr. Burke?' asks the man. I suppose he was Mr. Strickland.

‘On the platform of the railroad station at Long Branch last night. I’m the news agent there,’ I told him. ‘Long Branch? Then it can’t be yours, can it, May?’ She throws her head back sort of defiant like. ‘Certainly not. Mr. Burke has evidently made a mistake.’

“That made me sort of tired. Here am I tryin’ to be honest and return a purse that has nearly forty dollars in it. The first place I go, they acts as if they thought I was only makin’ an excuse to try to break in. The second, they acts as if they had never heard of a lost purse. I guess they could see that I was sort of gettin’ hot. I turned to him.

“‘That’s funny,’ I says. ‘There’s half a dozen cards in it with Mrs. Strickland’s name and address on ’em.’

“He looked kind of queer at that. He turned to her. But she was fussin’ with some flowers on the table as if she hadn’t rightly heard what I said. ‘That seems strange,’ he says. ‘Perhaps one of my friends might—’ But he didn’t let her finish. ‘What kind of a purse is it, Mr. Burke?’ But I

was still sore. So I got up as if I was goin' to go, and I says: 'Well, if you haven't lost one, I'll be movin' along.'

"Then he turned to her very gentle. 'It's just possible that you've made a mistake. Let Mrs. Strickland look at it,' he says to me. But I wasn't goin' to be caught like that. 'I'd rather have you describe it first,' I reminds him.

"'Of course; you're perfectly right,' he laughed at his own mistake. Then he says to her: 'You haven't more than two or three purses, May; describe them to Mr. Burke.' But she just kept on fussin' with them flowers. 'But I haven't lost a purse.' If I'd been her husband, I'd a wanted to shake her. Mebby he did. But he just treated her as if she was a bad child. 'I know,' he says. 'But it would only take a moment to describe them.'

"She looked more scared than ever. But she tossed her head and began to rattle off about the purses so fast that I could hardly catch what she said. 'Well, there's my mesh bag, with the oxidised silver purse; there's that green leather bag you gave me for my birthday—' I shook my

head to both. 'I guess this one isn't yours,' I said. And this time I *really* started for the door.

" 'No, I knew it wasn't,' she called after me. And her voice sounded as glad as could be! But he made one more try. 'Wait a minute; you've forgotten that Frenchy black velvet affair you usually carry.' 'What kind?' says I, from the door. 'Black velvet with a gold clasp.' I took it from my pocket and held it up. 'This it?' I asks, lookin' at him.

" 'Of course it is; isn't it, May?' She sort of fell into a big arm chair. She didn't look at the purse. She just looked at him. 'Yes, it looks like it. I don't understand,' she says in a faint voice.

" 'How much was in it, mum?' I asks her. 'About forty dollars, I think.' 'That's right,' I says to him. 'Thirty-eight dollars and seventy-five cents. Count it, if you don't mind, sir.'

" 'He took it over to the table and counted it. 'That's the amount that's here. You say you found this at Long Branch, Mr. Burke?'

" 'Yes, sir,' I told him. 'On the platform, last night. There was a slip of paper in it, with a

Long Branch address written on it—206 Henderson Place.’ ”

“You told him *that?*” I was too excited to be able to keep from interrupting him. He looked at me in surprise.

“Sure. Why not? And then I says to him: ‘I didn’t get a chanct to go round there till last evenin’. There wasn’t nobody home but an old woman who said she was the housekeeper. She said that she didn’t know any party by the name of Strickland, but that there’d been a lady there that day. So I thought I’d come to the address on the card.’ ‘I see, I see,’ says he. ‘Well, we’re greatly obliged to you, Mr. Burke.’ I started to go, thinkin’ that I’d had a good deal of trouble for nothin’, when he calls me back.

“ ‘Hold on, hold on,’ he says, with his hearty laugh. ‘You’re entitled to some compensation for your trouble.’ And he stuffs the bills into me hand. I thanked him, and he insisted on showin’ me out of the door himself. But never a word of thanks did *she* say. Women are queer, I know. But I never saw one yet so sorry to get back forty dollars as that one was!’ ”



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“I took it from my pocket and held it up”

Mr. Burke paused, evidently waiting for some comment from me. Without saying anything, I drew two photographs from my pocket. They were portraits of Strickland and his wife, which, I have neglected to say, Mrs. Stanwood had loaned me. Silently, I held them out for Mr. Burke's inspection.

"As like as two peas!" was his comment. But he immediately qualified the remark by adding that he couldn't have believed that Mrs. Strickland could ever have so happy an expression.

At that moment, a train pulled in, and Mr. Burke immediately became busy. I was only too thankful that we had not been interrupted before. When the station was once more quiet, I selected half-a-dozen books for myself. As none of the authors were known to me, I permitted myself to be guided in my choice by the friendly proprietor.

We parted with mutual expressions of esteem, which, I am convinced, were perfectly genuine on both sides. I was sure that I could rely upon him to give his remarkable testimony at the trial, should I require him. That he would be a good

witness, I was convinced. And I thought I could also depend upon my own judgment sufficiently to feel sure that his honest face would make a favourable impression upon any jury.

I returned to town feeling well rewarded for the trip. I had the foundation on which to build a defence to the murder charge. But there still remained the matter of the theft of the ten thousand dollars. I could not blind myself to the fact that that could not be explained away. Nor would any jury be inclined to accept any other motive for the murder, however strong it might be.

I knew that the entire police force of New York was on the lookout for any clue to the missing accomplice. I made up my mind to put the matter in the hands of a firm of private detectives whom I knew to be excellent. Not that I built any very high hopes upon the result of their endeavours. It was well nigh impossible to find a man of whom one had not the slightest description. Still, it was worth trying.

CHAPTER VII

I SET ABOUT GETTING DORIS'S STORY

THE next day it rained in torrents. All thought of going with my young friend for a walk in her favourite pleasure ground had to be abandoned. But, partly because I did not want to disappoint the child again, and partly because I wanted to question her on some points while the occurrences were still fresh in her mind, I determined to go up to Mrs. Stanwood's to see Doris in spite of the storm.

Glancing up at the drawing-room windows before I crossed the street, I could see her gazing disconsolately down at the wet pavement. A sudden realisation of her loneliness swept over me. Poor little girl! That she had suddenly and in an inexplicable manner lost both her parents was all that she knew now. How much more terrible would be her grief when she grew old enough to realise in what manner that loss had come about.

I stood for several minutes on the kerb, hoping

that her glance might turn in my direction. At length my patience was rewarded. She saw and recognised me. I waved my hand to her, and she returned my salute, immediately disappearing from her post. I hastened across to the building, and, in a few moments found myself at Mrs. Stanwood's door. Doris was there, standing beside the maid. She gave me one of her pretty little courtesies, and held up her cheek to be kissed. An act which touched me most deeply, and made me feel, if possible, more remorseful than ever when I thought of the pain I might be about to cause her.

"Come right in the drawing-room," she whispered in my ear. "I didn't tell them you were coming, 'cause I wanted it to be a surprise."

I was greatly puzzled. Who were *they*? I looked to the maid for an explanation. But she gave me no help, but stood looking down at Doris with an indulgent and kindly smile.

"Mrs. Stanwood begs you to excuse her until later," she said. "She hopes to see you before you go."

Doris watched me with growing impatience while I divested myself of my mackintosh and

umbrella. When I was quite ready, she took my hand and led me into the drawing-room. Seated opposite each other at a diminutive table which was all set out with toy dishes were Hermann and the new doll that I had sent. My surprise was so genuine, that Doris was delighted. She danced up and down, clapping her hands.

"You didn't guess who it was, did you?"

"I certainly did not. Then you liked your new dolly, did you?"

"Oh, yes!" she assured me. "And Hermann likes her, too. Her name is Gretchen," she announced.

I bowed formally to Gretchen, and was casting about in my mind as to just how I might best begin the task in hand, when Doris solved the problem for me by giving me a lead.

"Where did you go yesterday? Aunt Helen said you were going away."

"I went down to Long Branch," I said promptly.

"Oh, that's where Mr. Trask goes fishing, and where my mamma's purse was lost. Have you seen my mamma?"

"Not yet," I said hastily. "But I saw your daddy yesterday."

"Oh, did you! How is he? What did he say? And when is he coming for me?"

"I think his arm is better, I'm glad to say. He didn't say anything, because," I hastened to add, for she looked as if she were going to cry, "I didn't tell him anything about seeing you. I wanted that to be a surprise."

I could have blushed at myself! But what could I do? Fortunately, Doris accepted my explanation.

"But when is he coming for me?"

"How would you like me to take you to see him first?"

She sprang to her feet. "Oh, goody, goody! I'll tell Aunt Helen. And it won't take Margaret a minute to get me ready!"

She was nearly out of the door before I could stop her. Children are so precipitate!

"Doris! Doris! Wait a moment!" I called. She came back to my side reluctantly.

"I don't mean now, not to-day, my dear child."

Her face clouded with disappointment.

"To-morrow?"

"No, not to-morrow. Sit down here beside me, and listen a minute."

She obeyed, sitting close beside me and looking up into my face. Now I *was* in for it!

"Listen, Doris," I said, taking her hand in mine. "It won't be for quite a while, probably not for more than a week. But you must be very patient. I told you, didn't I, that I was trying to help your father and that I felt sure that you could help him, too, if only you would be a brave little girl?"

She nodded her head, without speaking.

"Well, the way you can help him is to tell me some things that I want to know and that I am sure you can tell me."

"I'll tell Daddy anything."

"Yes, but that won't do just now. You see, he mustn't get excited on account of his hurt arm."

"How did he hurt his arm?" she asked quickly.

"A bad man hit his arm with a big stick."

"When?"

"The night he came home."

"Why didn't Daddy hurt him with that shiny thing he carries in his bag?"

"What shiny thing, Doris?"

"He called it a—a re-vol-ver," she said slowly, trying to recall the unfamiliar word.

I was compelled to wipe my face with my handkerchief.

"Where did you ever see a revolver?" I asked with a laugh which I tried to make light.

"Why, when he went to get Hermann out of his bag, I saw a shiny thing lying in it. And while Daddy was unwrapping Hermann, I picked it up. When he saw me, he dropped Hermann on the floor, and grabbed it out of my hand. He told me I must never touch it. That I might hurt myself. That it was a re-vol-ver, and that it was to hurt bad people with."

"What did he do with it then?"

"I don't know. For then I saw Hermann on the floor and I ran to pick him up."

"Well!" I said, "I think you have a good memory for other things beside numbers. You remember a big word like revolver, and you never saw such a thing but once in your life."

A curious look came into her eyes. Her face flushed. She hung her head. Then she looked up bravely.

"I did see it one more time," she said in a low voice.

"And when was that?"

She buried her little face in the hollow of my arm.

"Daddy had it in his hand when he was running out the door. Oh, please don't make me talk about it, it frightens me so!"

I soothed her as best I could. But I was greatly puzzled. What could frighten a child in seeing her father run out of the door even if he were armed with a weapon the use of which she couldn't possibly understand? Could it be that Strickland had threatened his wife first? But I instantly dismissed that idea from my mind. No, Doris had something else in her mind. But she had gone to bed long before. Even if she had been lying awake all that time, it was hard to see what could have frightened her so much. Strickland and his wife must have had a terrible scene. Evidently the child had been so badly frightened

at what she had heard that she had come running out of the bedroom. It was my unpleasant duty to drag the whole story from her unwilling lips.

"Who do you suppose I saw when I was down at Long Branch?" I asked, more to gain time than for anything else.

"I don't know," she said languidly, raising her head. But I saw that she welcomed the change of subject.

"Mr. Burke."

"Mr. Burke?"

"Yes. He is the man who brought your mother's purse back to her."

"He must be a nice man."

"He is. But how do you know? You didn't see him?"

"No, sir. But when I heard Daddy going out to the door with him, I ran out to ask Mamma if she had got her purse back, and I heard Daddy and the man talking in the hall, and I could tell by the way Daddy talked that he thought he was nice."

"And what did your mother say?"

"Oh, nothing. She said she had found it, and that I must go back to bed like a good girl. And when I told her I couldn't go to sleep, she said I must go to sleep. But I didn't for ever so long."

"And did you come out again?"

"Yes, sir." The look of fear came back into her face. "Must I tell that part? Oh, please don't make me."

"I fear you must, my dear. Remember, everything you tell me is going to help your father."

She sought my hand again. "When—when I came out next time, was when Daddy was running out the door. And Mamma—" Her voice broke. She had to wait a minute before going on. "And Mamma was lying on the sofa, crying. And I ran to her and said: 'Mamma, Mamma! What's the matter?' And then I began to cry, too."

She was crying now. I could only pat her little hand. I would have given anything I possessed at that moment if I could have stopped there.

"Go on, Doris. Remember that you're helping. I know it's hard, dear child!"

"She wouldn't say anything to me. She acted as if she didn't know I was there. And then she pushed me away and ran over to the telephone. And she said: 'He's gone! He's gone! If he finds him, he'll kill him! His whole life will be ruined!' And then she took the telephone in her hand and called loud into it. 'Hello! Hello! Give me 182 River.'

"And then she saw me. And—and she took me in her arms. And she called me her darling, and her baby, and her little girl. And then she called into the telephone again, and she asked if Mr. Trask was there. But he wasn't."

"How did you know that?"

"Because she said she'd call again."

"What did she do then?"

"She cried, and walked up and down the room. And I cried, too. And I was so frightened! And I'm frightened now."

Again the poor child hid her face. But she was a brave little thing! For after a minute she went on again without any urging from me.

"And Mamma's hair came down, and she didn't notice it. And then she stopped a minute and told me to go to Bertha's room and see if she was in bed. And I wasn't to wake her if she was asleep. I was just to open the door as quiet as I could and look in. It took me a long time 'cause the door creaks so. But I saw Bertha in bed and asleep, and I didn't wake her. And I came back and told Mamma. She had fixed her hair up, but not as nice as she always does. And her hat was on the table beside the telephone.

"And I asked her where my daddy was, and why he didn't come back. And she didn't tell me. And then I asked her if she was going out, too. And she didn't answer at all. She was crying again, but not so loud. And then she ran again over to the telephone and told them she wanted 182 River again. And she called awful loud: 'Is that you, Gerald Trask?' And I ran over and held onto her dress. And then—" The poor child actually wrung her hands. "And then I heard the telephone give a funny little noise."

"A noise? What sort of a noise?"

"It sort of went 'Bang'! Like a firecracker."

“And did your mamma hear it, too?”

“Yes, sir. For she screamed out loud, and said: ‘My God! He’s killed him!’ And I was frightened worse than ever. And I begged her to take me in her arms because I was frightened. And she *did* take me in her arms, and she cried some more and said ‘Good-bye.’ And then she put me down on the sofa, and ran over to the table and put on her hat. And then,” sobbed poor Doris, “she went away.”

I took the poor child on my lap, and let her cry her heart out with her head on my shoulder. It only goes to show how curiously the human mind will work at times when I admit that, in the midst of my genuine sympathy for the poor tortured child, the thought of McLean’s face if he could see me, flashed into my mind.

After a short time, she began to cry less violently. The force of her grief seemed to be about spent. I looked up to see Mrs. Stanwood standing in the doorway. If anything she looked more ill than when I had seen her before. Her face wore a smile that was tinged with bitterness. She

shook her head silently as she pointed to the child in my arms.

"And do you mean to say that you really believe that all this can do any possible good?" she asked.

I was stung by the injustice of her words.

"You cannot believe that I derive much pleasure from it," I retorted. "Surely I do not look to be the sort of person who would find wanton pleasure in this sort of thing!"

"Doris dear," she said gently, ignoring my words, "hadn't you better go out and let Margaret get you ready for luncheon? You will feel better after she has bathed your eyes."

Doris obediently slid down from my lap and went slowly towards the door. On the threshold she paused to look back at me.

"Good-bye, Mr. Arbuckle," she said. "And you'll tell my daddy that I tried to help, although it made me cry?"

"Indeed, I will. I'll tell him what a brave little girl you are!" I assured her as well as I could for the lump in my throat.

After she had disappeared, Mrs. Stanwood repeated her question in a slightly modified form.

"But what good can it do? Can what you have drawn from Doris help Robert Strickland in the slightest degree? I do not see how it can."

"It is only a beginning," I admitted. "But, remember, up to now I have been like a man groping in the dark. But surely you realise that what I have already learned will be a foundation for building up a defence? There are many missing links as yet. Very well; I must find them. You must acknowledge that I am heavily handicapped until I can find some trace of Mrs. Strickland."

"You will never find her." For a moment her face lost its bitter look. The tears brimmed over her faded eyes. "I am convinced now that she is no longer living. Small wonder if she should have made way with herself. After all, there is a limit to what women can endure. Poor May! She has been called upon to bear more than her share!"

"Then you *could* supply at least some of the missing links?" I said boldly.

"Yes; I could supply many of them."

"And you refuse to do so, when a man's life may depend upon the very thing you are holding back?"

"I have already told you that anything I might say would not help him."

"Let me ask you this: Have you any knowledge of the events that occurred on the night of June 24th that might reasonably be supposed to have led up to the shooting?"

"None whatever. I will go further and say that as far as the events of that night are concerned, I am as much in the dark as you are. From the little that Doris has told me—for I have not questioned her as you have—and from what I have learned from the papers—for, since you were here, I have read every word of the testimony that was given at the inquest—I can only suppose that the unbelievable, the incredible has happened. Even now, I tell myself that it cannot be true. That it is all a dreadful nightmare from which I must presently awake! I can no more account for the friendship that is said to have existed between my brother-in-law and that man Gerald Trask than

I can account for the presence of evil in the world. How May could have permitted such a relation to begin, passes my comprehension."

"Then you knew Gerald Trask?"

"Thank God, I never saw him in my life! But I knew enough of him without ever having had to see him. Let me tell you this, and I can speak as one having authority. Killing was too good for a man like that. He should have been tortured as well. And even then, he could not have suffered enough to atone for all the agony he has caused others."

There was no mistaking the bitter sincerity of her words. And I was also convinced that she knew as little of the events of the night of June 24th as I did. The knowledge that she possessed and which she could not be made to see might be of the highest importance to me as Robert Strickland's counsel had to do with some event or events antedating the night when Trask was shot. I rose to take my leave.

"I have only one more thing to ask," I said. "If, later on, I could convince you that the knowledge I suspect you of having would be the only

thing that could save the life of Robert Strickland, would you come forward?"

She hesitated for a moment.

"Yes; I would come forward. Believe me, it is not that I am trying to spare myself, or even that I am trying to shield others. It is only that I am sure that it would all be useless. And," she added, "I warn you that I am very hard to convince."

"I promise that I will only call upon you when all else fails."

"If all else fails, I will tell you what I know. Then, if you can show me that I can save Robert, I will."

"It's a promise?"

"It's a promise."

And with that I had to content myself.

CHAPTER VIII

A CHILD MY STAR WITNESS

THE next few weeks were in a way as busy as any I had ever known. I had arranged with my detective agency that I should have a report, either written or verbal, from them each night in regard to whatever progress they might make in their search for the missing man who was supposed to have actually taken the money from the safe. Night after night, it was the same story. There was nothing to report. Granting that he had ever existed, he had disappeared, leaving no faintest clue behind him.

I was yet to be convinced that there had ever been such a person. But I was fully aware that my personal convictions would have slight weight with a jury in the face of the testimony that I knew Mrs. Trask would give. It seemed to be an incontrovertible fact that some one had attacked Mrs. Trask, had strangled her into a state of semi-consciousness and smothered her with the

table-scarf. It would hardly help my case to suggest that Strickland had done so. Besides, I knew that to be impossible.

Everywhere I turned, I seemed to arrive at a stone wall. What light could not Mrs. Strickland have thrown on the matter! But she had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed her, to employ a somewhat trite figure of speech.

What had she been to Trask? Had I been able to answer that question, I would have possessed the key to the whole riddle. And the one person who seemed to be able to answer that question for me, was her sister, who, without taking me into her confidence, declared that anything she might say would only make things blacker for my client.

True, I had her promise that if all else failed, she would place the facts in her possession at my service. That it might then be too late did not seem to occur to her.

And certainly nothing could be more hopeless than attempting to get anything out of my client. When I pointed out to him that the course he was

pursuing was nothing short of suicidal, his only comment was to say that his life had no value in his eyes. He did not fear death. He welcomed it, on the contrary. Even the brutal reminder that the death which he seemed to be courting was a disgraceful one, that for all time his name would be associated in the minds of men with all that was dishonourable, even cowardly, since he had taken his victim by surprise without giving him a chance to defend himself, left him perfectly unmoved.

On one phase of the case, and one only, was he in the least communicative. He assured me with an earnestness and sincerity that I could not doubt, that to the best of his knowledge there had been no one present but himself and Mrs. Trask when he fired the fatal shot at Trask. He, *also*, had not seen the so-called "accomplice."

The only thing that led him to believe that he had ever existed was that when he entered the library he had found Mrs. Trask lying on the floor, her head enveloped in some sort of a cloth. This had puzzled him for the moment. But the

entrance of Trask from his bedroom had taken his attention from the semi-conscious woman, and it was only when I began to question him that the incident recurred to his mind. It must be borne in mind that he had never met Mrs. Trask. But his natural inference that it was she, had been justified by the facts which I retailed to him in the course of our several interviews.

His arm was still excessively painful. Glover's stick must have indeed been a stout one, or he was more muscular than one would have gathered from his appearance. Most of the time when I was with him, he passed lying on his cot with his eyes closed. But there were times when he was in such pain that remaining quiescent seemed to be impossible. Upon such occasions, he would pace back and forth in his cell until the pain exhausted itself.

His manner to me was always courteous in the extreme. Not that he took any pains to hide from me that in my official capacity, I was only tolerated because he knew of no way of forbidding my visits. He persisted in his declaration that

he did not wish to be defended. Even if he had wished for my services, what possible good could it do?

He had killed Gerald Trask. He admitted doing so. There was at least one witness to the murder. Why all this red-tape and delay? He went so far as to ask me how long after his conviction it would probably be before he could hope to be sentenced. For the moment, I was unable to make proper allowance for the man's condition. His arm must have been giving him greater pain than usual, as during my entire visit he had been pacing up and down his cell, a thing which I had never known him to keep up so long before—and I confess I took a cruel pleasure in pointing out to him that that "being sentenced," as he called it, was little more than an empty formality with us nowadays; that I thought he could safely count upon at least a couple of years' respite pending the various appeals et cætera, with which I purposed impeding the progress of Justice.

I shall not soon forget the look he gave me! But I was sufficiently contrite and ashamed of myself without that, the moment the words had

left my lips. It is not often that I lose my temper so completely. Still, and not entirely in extenuation of my own lack of self-control, I submit that, to put it mildly, Robert Strickland was a most unusual and difficult client.

It was clear that the only persons upon whom I could depend were Doris and Burke, with Mrs. Stanwood as a last resort when all else failed. Not a very satisfactory state of affairs it must be admitted. Still Burke's story and the child's fitted into one another in a most convincing manner. I could certainly establish beyond a reasonable doubt the intrigue carried on between Gerald Trask and the wife of his friend.

That it had been going on for some little time seemed probable from the cynical effrontery with which they appeared to have carried it off. They pretended never to have met. Mrs. Trask had testified to the fact that when she asked her husband on the night of his death what Mrs. Strickland was like, if she were "nice" and if she were "pretty," or words to that effect, he had carelessly replied that he couldn't tell her since he had never seen the lady in question. And it was morally

certain that they had been together in Long Branch only the day before.

Again, when in response to Strickland's telegram, Trask had gone to the house, Strickland had presented his false friend to his wife saying that he wanted them to know one another, and regretting that Trask had to hurry away. I repeat that, to my mind, those two little incidents stamped them both as being practised in duplicity. It was hardly a surprise to hear of Trask's action. His reputation, as I think I have mentioned, was such as to prepare one for any underhanded dealings on his part where women were concerned. But I confess I was astonished at the light in which Mrs. Strickland appeared.

All that I had been able to learn of her stamped her as a quiet, refined woman of distinctly domestic tastes, wholly and entirely devoted to her husband and child. All of which only went to show that she had succeeded in deceiving her friends and acquaintances as completely as she had her trusting husband. This being the condition of affairs, I was able to understand one thing which had puzzled me considerably hitherto. And that

was the matter of the loan of the ten thousand dollars.

While Trask's business reputation was as good as his personal reputation was bad, I had heard him criticised for a certain hardness in his business dealings with even his closest friends. That he should have consented to make so large a loan to a man whose affairs seemed to be in the parlous state that Strickland's evidently were at the time of the giving of the note, had never seemed consistent with his ordinary policy and methods. Certainly Strickland could hardly have been in a position to offer any great amount of security for the money advanced.

But Gerald Trask was just the sort of man to whom a situation of this sort would have an extra appeal. To wear the mask of a disinterested and generous friend while carrying on an underhand and vulgar intrigue, would have gratified his mordant sense of humour, would no doubt have added just the sauce necessary to keep him interested in going on with it.

Yes, every part of the unsavoury affair that had to do with Trask seemed thoroughly consistent

with his reputation. But I found it almost as difficult to reconcile Mrs. Strickland to her rôle as I did to believe that her husband was a thief.

Granted that she was infatuated with Trask; granted that her love for her husband was all a pretence; or, attributing to her the meanest and most sordid motives rising out of a desire for luxuries that her husband could no longer provide for her, granted any or all of these things, how explain the fact that a woman so skilled in deception should suddenly go all to pieces and lose her head as completely as she had apparently done on the night of her husband's return.

Long Branch is not such a great distance that there would be anything necessarily remarkable in a woman's choosing to run down there for a day. There are many people who go there even earlier in the season than the end of June, not to mention the large number of persons who live there the year round.

And yet a person as fertile in resource as Mrs. Strickland must necessarily have been suddenly paralysed with fright at the apparition of a good-natured, middle-aged Irishman who comes to re-

store to her the purse she has lost, and for which she has frantically been telephoning at least twice that very day.

To be sure the purse contained the compromising address of the Trask house. Burke had blurted that out. But that was not until he had been at the house for some little time. And he had said that Mrs. Strickland had "looked scared" from the moment that he came into the room.

Nothing could have occurred earlier in the evening to arouse her husband's suspicions. Doris had said that neither her father nor Mr. Trask had been at all angry about anything. They had apparently chatted for some little time in a friendly manner. And just as Trask had been on the point of leaving, Strickland had presented him to his wife.

Why had not the woman frankly said that she had suddenly taken it into her head to run down to the seaside for the afternoon—there were a dozen of excuses she might have thought of to explain the impulse—that she had in some manner lost her purse, and claimed it as soon as Burke

made his errand known? Burke would have gone away satisfied. The chances were a thousand to one against his having mentioned going to the other house in search of the owner, and even if he had, he would hardly have gone into the particulars of the address. By this simple and natural action she would have had the purse and whatever articles it might have contained which she did not wish her husband to see.

And there was still another thing to be explained. That was the attitude of Mrs. Stanwood. I think I have said that I prided myself upon being a good judge of character. While Mrs. Stanwood impressed me as a woman whom life had treated harshly, and who was embittered in consequence, if there was one impression that she gave me more than another, it was that she was more than commonly austere. That such a woman should countenance anything like an intrigue between her sister and Gerald Trask, I could not bring myself to believe.

And yet she knew all about Trask. She had spoken of him to me with extraordinary vehemence. She had spoken of her sister with every

indication of affection and sympathy; had alluded to a mysterious shock which she had had long ago, but had given me every reason to understand that all her troubles were a thing of the past. She had declared that she had been amazed to learn that Gerald Trask and Robert Strickland were on terms of friendship, and that she knew absolutely nothing that might in any way have led up to the events of the night of June 24th. And she and her sister were on intimate terms and saw each other frequently.

How McLean and I threshed the matter back and forth! Night after night, when his work was done, he would join me in my study and we would go over the whole ground with as much zest as if the thing had happened only the day before and this was the first time we had discussed it. We would take turns in trying to convince each other of the most impossible suppositions. An exercise by no means as childish as it sounds. Indeed, for keeping the mind elastic and alert I know of nothing more beneficial than debate, unless it be the ancient game of Draughts, in which, unfortunately McLean was never able to interest him-

self, possibly for the reason that he could never acquire any degree of proficiency at it.

I am sorry to say that for the first time in his life, I thought that I detected unmistakable signs of age in McLean. I won't go so far as to say that his mental powers actually showed symptoms of decay—although I found him more obstinately tenacious of his own ideas than I had ever before known him to be—but he seemed to have lost much of his sense of proportion.

For example, while he professed to feel nothing but profound sympathy for the unfortunate Strickland, he seemed to regard the saving of his life as a matter of comparative unimportance, a sort of incident in the case. The theft of the ten thousand dollars was the important thing. And he was perfectly obsessed with the notion that Mrs. Trask, and no one else, had taken it, or could have taken it.

The assault? There was nothing to it. She had been frightened before she had had an opportunity to close the safe, by the entrance of Strickland. She it was who had snatched the table cover and thrown it over her own head. She had

then dropped to the floor and pretended to be unconscious, as she was when Strickland had had his brief glimpse of her.

Of course this disposed of the accomplice. Had Strickland seen him? Had Glover seen him? Had even Trask seen him? To all of these questions he answered "No!" He explained the last statement rather cleverly by saying that it seemed a bit unlikely that a man entering a room and seeing his wife struggling with a strange man would first stop to answer the telephone before going to her assistance.

I confess that I found it extremely difficult to refute this line of argument. I contented myself with pointing out that the whole thing was of secondary importance. A fact which he could not be brought to see, or at least to acknowledge.

And so in the end we had to come back to Doris. My heart sank at the thought of the task I had before me. She would be my star witness. I must go over and over the story with her; must try to make her see what was important and what was not; must drill her, harry her, worry her, torment

her, until for all time the very sound of my name would be hateful in her ears. A pleasant task, truly! But it had to be done.

I had anticipated having to combat her aunt's opposition. But to my surprise, beyond regretting with me the harsh necessity which compelled me to adopt such a course, she offered no objection to it.

I will not attempt to describe those trying hours. She always broke down and wept as she neared the end. If anything, her terror when she came to describe the sound she had heard through the telephone, seemed to increase as time went by. More than once, I was on the point of abandoning the idea of calling her at all. But what became of my case without her? Could anything else but his child's story save the father's life? I thought not.

Then I had to accustom her to the idea of repeating the whole thing before people, before strangers. A thousand times I reminded her that it was all to help her father. It was touching to see how that thought alone sustained her and spurred her flagging courage.

With her aunt's permission, I brought her home with me to luncheon one day, and succeeded in persuading her later in the afternoon to tell her story before McLean. After that, I was less fearful. To be sure there were days when she seemed actually unable to recall little incidents which she had remembered perfectly only the day before. Fortunately the day appointed for the trial of the case was not far off. Otherwise, I should have been fearful of a nervous breakdown overtaking my star witness.

The day before the trial, she took me for the long promised walk on Riverside Drive. I had promised her that we would not even speak of the dread subject. But as we were coming home, she introduced it herself.

"Mr. Arbuckle, if I get really and truly frightened and forget that I am being a help to my daddy, will you hold up your finger like this to remind me?" She held up the middle finger of her left hand, the other fingers closed.

"I certainly will, my dear," I promised.

"I don't think I'll forget, but I may, if I get frightened, you know."

"There's nothing to be frightened about," I assured her.

But I prepared for the morrow with as heavy a heart as I ever had in my life. Once get the robbery motive out of the heads of the Jury, and we had a chance. But I didn't yet see just how that was to be done.

CHAPTER IX

THE STATE'S STRONG CASE

FOR even the two days while the District Attorney and I had been wrangling over the choice of Jurymen, the court room had been crowded to the doors. To my astonishment, a large part of the assemblage was made up of women. Many of them were aristocratic looking, even refined. I learned later that a number of the leaders of society were present. For some obscure reason, the trial was the fashion.

I could not account for this on the ground of the social position of the Trasks. And certainly, the Stricklands made no pretensions to mingling with the great world. While the former had enjoyed a position in society good in its way, they had never aspired—or if they had done so, they could have scarcely been said to have realised their dream—to a position in the so-called Four Hundred.

But, be that as it may, wealth and fashion were

well represented, and hundreds of those unfortunate enough to be without any especial influence were reported to have been turned away.

His Honour, Judge Dinsmore, whose reputation for impartiality and fairness is equalled only by his reputation for a profound knowledge of the law, presided.

The third day of the trial found us well before noon with the Jury Box at last filled. I heard the Judge pronounce the words: "You may proceed, Mr. Gray," with a feeling of infinite relief. At last, we were to begin.

Mr. Gray, the District Attorney, rose slowly to his feet. As he paused a moment before beginning his address, I said to myself, as I have had occasion to say before, that an imposing and dignified presence is a tremendous asset before a Jury. I realised that the greatest battle of my life lay before me.

"So be it," said I to myself, "and may the just cause win!"

And then the District Attorney began.

"May it please the Court: Gentlemen of the Jury, this case is a very simple one. The facts,

as they have appeared from time to time in the newspapers, are no doubt familiar to all of you. In order to refresh your recollections, however, I will outline very briefly the circumstances which we shall put in evidence.

“Mr. Gerald Trask, as you know, was a prominent banker of this city. He was a distinguished member of the community, and occupied important places in the social and financial worlds. Among Mr. Trask’s acquaintances was Robert Strickland, the defendant. At the time they became acquainted, Strickland was a rather prosperous business man, and he and Mr. Trask frequently met.

“Some months ago, Strickland began to have business troubles. The cause of these difficulties does not concern us, gentlemen. But what *does* interest us is that Strickland, becoming more and more involved, found it necessary to go to his friend, Gerald Trask, for financial assistance.

“Mr. Trask responded with his habitual generosity, and promptly loaned Strickland ten thousand dollars, taking the latter’s note as security. But Strickland’s business did not improve, and

he decided to migrate to the West. The note was payable on the 22nd of June, two days before the murder. When the 22nd arrived, Strickland was in Cleveland, Ohio, making arrangements for himself and family. He returned, however, on the 24th, the night of the murder, sent for Mr. Trask, and took up the note.

"I call your attention to the fact, gentlemen, that Strickland paid the debt in cash. He was a business man. He did not pay it in check or by draft, but in cash! Ten thousand dollars in cash! Mr. Trask had offered to let the loan stand until Strickland should be on his feet again. But Strickland wouldn't hear of it.

"You will understand his eagerness to cancel the debt in a moment, gentlemen. It was because he had evolved a little plan whereby he could wipe out the obligation without it costing him a cent. The scheme was simple enough, gentlemen.

"He knew very well that Mr. Trask would have to keep the ten thousand dollars in his house over night, and that he would almost certainly lock it up in the safe in his library. And what is more, gentlemen, he knew the combination to Mr.

Trask's safe. Bear in mind that only two people knew the combination to that safe—Gerald Trask and Strickland.

“But Strickland hadn't the nerve to do the job alone, so he called in an assistant. Accordingly, he and his accomplice entered Mr. Trask's house a few hours after Strickland had paid over the money. The accomplice went to work on the safe and Strickland stood guard. The professional burglar succeeded without much difficulty in opening the safe and extracting the ten thousand dollars, while Strickland superintended the job. Before they could escape, however, they were interrupted, first by Mrs. Trask and then by her husband.

“The accomplice made a hasty exit, taking the plunder with him. That was the last that was heard of the accomplice, gentlemen. Who he is, or where he went, we have been unable to learn.

“But Mr. Strickland was caught red-handed, and believing, evidently, that dead men tell no tales, he shot and killed his friend and benefactor, Gerald Trask, in cold blood.

“There you have the story, gentlemen. Mrs.

Trask, the widow of the murdered man, will tell it to you in detail. Her testimony will be corroborated by Mr. Stanley Glover, Mr. Trask's secretary.

"Thanks to his bravery, the assassin was disarmed and captured. It is Mr. Glover who has given us material assistance in linking up the chain of evidence against the defendant. I call your attention to the fact that not one of the acts is disputed. Strickland, realising the futility of interposing a defence, has refused—"

I was on my feet at that.

"I object to that."

"Counsel will not interrupt."

And Gray continued. "Strickland, I say, has refused to make any effort to defend himself. When he was arraigned—"

Again I made an objection only to be overruled once more.

"Counsel will not interrupt."

"When he was arraigned," continued the District Attorney, "he pleaded guilty to the indictment of murder in the first degree. Perhaps, gentlemen, you ask, if this be so, why are we here?"

Why is the County put to the expense of this trial? An expense which we taxpayers must meet in the end. Why must you business men be taken from your occupations? Why must you be compelled to lose your valuable time? Why is not the penalty allotted to murderers inflicted upon the defendant?

“And in answer to that, I say to you, because, gentlemen, the State is jealous of the lives of her citizens. To Her, the existence of an individual is sacred, no matter if he be depraved, degenerate, possessed of criminal instincts, dangerous to society. She will not permit even a self-confessed murderer to be put to death until twelve of his fellow citizens, sitting in solemn judgment, calmly, dispassionately hearing and weighing the facts, have decreed that that man shall suffer the consequences of his crime.

“That is why we are here to-day, gentlemen. That is why His Honour has assigned such distinguished counsel to defend Strickland. And that is why, before we ask you to visit upon this defendant the punishment he merits, we shall, by the unimpeachable testimony of eye-witnesses,

convince you of his guilt beyond the peradventure of a doubt.

“Unfortunately, his partner in crime has made good his escape. But the greater criminal is in our hands, gentlemen. We can make *him* pay the penalty of the law. I shall take up no more of your time. The facts will speak for themselves.”

The District Attorney resumed his seat. I could tell without looking at the Jury that he had produced a tremendous effect. He enjoyed no mean reputation as an orator. Every one, including myself, had expected that he would seize the occasion to give us the finest example of his talent. Certainly he could not hope to have the opportunity, soon again, for displaying it before so brilliant and distinguished an audience.

But with a shrewdness and self-control, for which I confess I had not given him credit, he had refrained from gratifying what I might call the more personal side of his vanity. No flowers of oratory could have served his ultimate purpose as well as the plain matter-of-fact tone that he had elected to adopt. It was as if he disdained to employ his great gifts in a case so palpably simple.

As I rose to address the Jury in my turn, I glanced at my client to see, if possible, what effect Mr. Gray's speech had had on him.

One would have said that he had not even heard it. He sat with his head on his chest and his eyes half closed. His attitude was almost identical with that he had preserved during the inquest. I doubt if any one in that crowded court room took as little interest in the proceedings as he.

"If the Court pleases: Gentlemen of the Jury," I began. "When His Honour assigned me to the defence of this case, it seemed to me that the prosecution's theory was untenable.

"I knew Mr. Strickland by reputation, and I scouted the burglary hypothesis. This belief strengthened as I became better acquainted with Mr. Strickland. A man of superlative honour and integrity, equipped with a splendid mentality and an excellent reputation, not addicted to bad habits or expensive luxuries, devotedly attached to his wife and child—that is not the sort of man who breaks into his friend's house for the purpose of theft.

“The case seemed to me to be not nearly so clear and simple as my friend Mr. Gray makes it out to be. But, despite my certainty that there lurked a mystery in this grim affair, I could learn nothing that would aid me in substantiating my belief.

“As my friend has told you, Mr. Strickland has maintained throughout an obstinate, unbreakable silence. In all my years at the Bar, gentlemen, I have never before encountered any one who has declined so resolutely to yield to persuasion. Threats, entreaties and logic alike have left him indifferent.

“At last I reached the conclusion that Strickland was shielding some one—most likely the unknown accomplice who assaulted Mrs. Trask and broke open the safe. In the hope of learning the identity of this man, and, if possible, the motive Strickland had in shielding him, I endeavoured to locate the members of Strickland’s family.

“Judge of my surprise, gentlemen, when I learned that the defendant’s wife had disappeared from her home on the night of the tragedy, and has not been seen nor heard from since. All my

attempts to find her have been fruitless. I have been forced to believe"—I spoke the words slowly, looking straight at Strickland as I did so—"that she took her life."

For the first time he showed emotion. His breath came in gasping sobs. His free hand was clenched. Tears forced their way from beneath his closed eyelids. I could not believe that my statement came to him altogether as a shock. That is, I did not think it possible that he had never entertained the idea himself. Rather was it the confirmation of his own secret fear that broke down at last his stony self-control.

Heartless as the statement may seem, I was glad to see it. Might not the thought of his child, now alone in the world but for him, impel him to make a tardy fight for his life? Might he not, at the eleventh hour, break the silence he had so obstinately maintained? And I had yet another blow for him. One that I felt certain would strike him in the heart! I felt almost as much of a brute as I did when dragging her story from poor little Doris' reluctant lips, or when patiently going over and over her testimony with her until

it should be in a form in which it could be presented in Court.

"*I did* succeed," I went on, speaking slowly and distinctly, "in finding Doris, the little daughter of the defendant. When you have heard her story, gentlemen, you will agree with me that to send Strickland to his death would be a gross miscarriage of justice. That is all for the present, gentlemen."

I had not miscalculated the effect of my closing words. At the mention of his child's name, for the first time Strickland had opened his eyes fully. Amazement and indignation were in his face. The glance of reproachful scorn that he gave me would have seared me, had I not felt buttressed by the conviction that what I had done, and was about to do, was for the best.

The last word had hardly fallen from my lips before he was on his feet. Leaning heavily against the table, he addressed his appeal to the Court.

"Your Honour, I won't have it! I won't have my little girl dragged into this case. I've pleaded

guilty," he went on with growing passion, "and I'm willing to suffer the consequences!"

"Your case is in the hands of your counsel," said Judge Dinsmore. There was both sympathy and understanding in his voice.

"I don't want counsel! I have no defence! Why don't you sentence me? Why—"

"Proceed, Mr. Gray," interrupted the Judge, sternly.

"Your Honour—" began Strickland once more.

"Silence!" thundered the Judge, banging with his gavel.

Strickland sank back into his chair.

"Call Mrs. Gerald Trask," said the District Attorney.

CHAPTER X

DORIS CREATES A SENSATION

IN going to the witness stand, Mrs. Trask did what I felt sure was a very characteristic thing. It was necessary, unless she chose to make a somewhat wide *détour* which could not have failed to attract attention, for her to pass close beside the table where the defendant was sitting. The dignified course would have been to have chosen the nearer way, without paying any attention to the unhappy man, crouched once more over his table.

But Mrs. Trask saw an opportunity to indulge in a little piece of theatricalism. With a slow and stately step, she reached Strickland's side. For a long moment she paused, holding back her trailing black skirt with one gloved hand, while she swept that bowed figure with one of those scorching and brilliant glances which so transformed her face. I cannot say as to the effect that her action produced upon the majority of

those who noted it, but I felt sure that all delicately minded people would condemn it. So much the better, if the Jury should be of my way of thinking!

The oath having been administered, the District Attorney began his examination.

"What is your name?"

"Joan Trask."

"Mrs. Trask, are you the widow of Gerald Trask?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long were you married to Mr. Trask?"

"Almost fifteen years."

I could see that this answer created some little surprise among those persons who moved in the same social set that Mrs. Trask had done. Evidently they had not been present at the inquest or they would have recalled that Mrs. Trask had then admitted that her marriage had for family reasons been kept secret for some years.

"Do you remember the night of June 24th?"

"Indeed I do."

"Where were you on that evening?"

"I had been dining out with friends."

"What time did you arrive home?"

"About half-past nine."

"Now, Mrs. Trask, I want you to describe to the Court and Jury everything that occurred after you arrived home."

It is hardly necessary to go over her testimony again. In substance it has already been given, at least, in so far as her account of the murder and the events preceding it. But there were some things of interest in her description of what followed. She had just finished telling of how Glover had sent for the doctor, when she paused, as if waiting for a further question.

Mr. Gray seeing that she hesitated, assisted her by asking:

"Yes, and then?"

"A few minutes later, the police arrived."

"And your husband was dead by that time?"

"Yes. He died instantly, the doctor said."

"Now, Mrs. Trask, did you observe the safe before the police arrived?"

We were coming to that part of the testimony which I had so much reason to dread.

"Yes; the safe was opened."

"Did you notice if any of the contents were missing?"

"Yes, sir. The ten thousand dollars was gone."

"That's all, Mrs. Trask."

"You may cross-examine the witness, Mr. Arbuckle."

He flashed a glance at me in which I thought I detected a gleam of triumph, and took his seat.

"Mrs. Trask," I said getting slowly on my feet, "did you recognise your assailant, the man who opened the safe?"

"No. He came upon me so quickly. And the room was in total darkness."

"Are you sure that no one but Mr. Trask knew the combination of the safe?"

That dangerous gleam flashed across her face.

"Mr. Strickland knew it."

"I move to strike out that answer as not responsive," I said calmly.

Instantly Gray was on his feet.

"I—. Your Honour—"

"The motion is denied," ruled Judge Dinsmore.

"I respectfully except. Mrs. Trask, did any

words pass between Strickland and your assailant?"

"I cannot be sure. There was a ringing in my ears. He almost strangled me."

"But, to the best of your knowledge, they did not speak to each other?"

"I can't say one way or the other."

I waited a moment.

"Mrs. Trask," I said slowly, emphasising my words, "do you know who 'May' is?"

Mrs. Trask was even more emphatic in her reply.

"No, sir, I do not."

"You are quite sure?"

"Perfectly sure."

I said that I had no further questions.

"That's all, Mrs. Trask," said Gray, and she left the stand.

"Is Dr. Morgan in the witness room?" asked the District Attorney.

There was a moment's delay while one of the attendants opened a door leading from the court room and called Doctor Morgan's name.

There was no answer.

"Your Honour," explained Gray, "Dr. Morgan is the physician who examined Mr. Trask's body. He told me that he might be detained."

"Dr. Morgan is not here," announced the attendant.

"With Your Honour's permission," continued the District Attorney, "I will call Mr. Glover, in order not to delay the trial."

"Yes."

"Call Mr. Stanley Glover."

"Stanley Glover," called the attendant. And young Glover came into the court.

"What is your name?" asked Gray, after Glover had taken the oath.

"Stanley Glover."

"Mr. Glover, you were the late Gerald Trask's private secretary, were you not?"

"I was, sir."

"On the night of June the 24th, after you left the library with Mrs. Trask's books, what did you do?"

"I went upstairs to my room."

"Describe what occurred then."

"I began going over the books. About half an

hour later I heard a shot, then I heard Mrs. Trask scream, and another shot fired. I picked up a heavy cane I happened to have in my room, and rushed downstairs to the library. Mr. Trask's body was on the floor, and Strickland was standing at the other side of the room, with a revolver in his hand."

"What did you do?"

"I dashed at Strickland, and struck his arm with the cane. He dropped the revolver and fell to the floor."

"When you entered the room, did you see any sign of the other man?"

"No, sir. The French windows at the back of the room were open, and he must have escaped that way."

"What happened then?"

While Mrs. Trask was telephoning for the police, I kept watch on Strickland. Then I happened to remember what Mr. Trask had said about giving Strickland the card with the combination to the safe on it, and I thought that he might have it on him, and that, if he did, it would prove of value to the police."

"I object to the witness stating what he thought," I objected.

"Yes; strike out that part of the answer," ordered the Judge.

The stenographer did so.

"Just tell what you did and saw, Mr. Glover."

"Well, I began to search Strickland's pockets."

"Was that before the police arrived?"

"Yes. I was afraid that he might destroy the card."

I sprang to my feet. I did not propose to permit Mr. Glover to employ the tactics he had used at the inquest!

"Your Honour, I ask that the witness be instructed to answer the questions and no more."

"Strike out the answer," commanded the Judge.

Then, leaning over his desk, he said to Glover in a kind but firm tone:

"You must confine your answers to the questions which are put to you. You are not to volunteer anything, and you are not to tell what passed through your mind. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Your Honour."

"Proceed, Mr. Gray."

"Did you find the card in Strickland's pocket?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is this it?"

He passed a card up to the witness, who examined it carefully.

"Yes."

"I offer it in evidence," said Gray, repossessing himself of the card. He then addressed himself to the Jury.

"This People's exhibit A. is a visiting card. On the face is engraved in old English type the name of 'Mr. Gerald Trask.' Below that is written in pencil, '206 Henderson Place, Long Branch.' On the other side is written in words and figures: '14 right 2,27, left 3.' Is there any question about the handwriting, Mr. Arbuckle?"

"You'd better prove it," said I dryly.

"Mr. Glover, are you familiar with Mr. Trask's handwriting?"

"Yes; I know it perfectly."

"You've seen it often on letters and documents?"

"Hundreds of times."

He handed the card back to the witness.

"I show you this card and ask you whether the address '206 Henderson Place, Long Branch,' is in Mr. Trask's writing."

"It is."

"Now turn the card, please. Are the words and figures, '14 right 2,27 left 3' also in Mr. Trask's writing?"

"They are."

"There's no doubt in your mind about that?"

"Absolutely none," said the witness with conviction.

"Do you know the significance of those figures, '14 right 2,27 left 3'?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"It is the combination to Mr. Trask's safe."

"*How* do you know?"

"When the police arrived, I gave them this card. We locked the safe, and opened it with this combination."

"Now, Mr. Glover, I call your attention to the fact that the card is torn almost in half. Can you explain how that occurred?"

"Yes, sir. As I took the card from Strickland's

pocket, he snatched it out of my hand, and started to tear it in half. Before he had torn it all the way, I managed to get hold of it again."

I did not cross-examine the witness.

The next witness was Dr. Morgan.

"Dr. Morgan, in what condition did you find Mr. Trask's body?"

"I found two bullet wounds."

"Describe them, please."

"One was a slight flesh wound on the right shoulder caused by a grazing bullet."

"And the other?"

"The other bullet entered the body just above the left breast, and lodged in the heart."

"That's all, Dr. Morgan."

Again, I stated that I had no cross-examination.

"That's the case for the prosecution, Your Honour."

There was a murmur, possibly of surprise, in the court room, which His Honour promptly checked. I heard the words:

"Proceed with the defence, Mr. Arbuckle."

Strickland may have thought that he had

drained the cup of bitterness to the dregs, but I realised that one of the bitterest hours of his life was yet to come. From my heart, I pitied him! But it was the only way.

“I’ll call Miss Doris Strickland.”

The effect of these words on Strickland was electric. His child was, apparently, the one point at which he might be said to be still vulnerable. I, of course, understood the deeper significance of his attitude. It was not only his child but his wife that he was willing to protect even at the sacrifice of going to a dishonoured grave, not only as a cold-blooded murderer, but with the additional brand of a thief. That was what I deemed it my duty to prevent.

He stood swaying by the table as if he were intoxicated, as he pleaded once again with His Honour not to let me carry out my plan for his defence.

“No, Your Honour, no! Not that! Don’t let her testify. She’s my little girl. She is all I’ve got left. *Don’t* let her testify!”

For the moment, even Mrs. Trask might have found it in her heart to pity him. But I saw no

sign of pity in her cold face as I glanced at her.

"You must leave your case in the hands of your counsel," admonished Judge Dinsmore, gently. "He will protect your interests."

"I don't want to be protected. Protect my little girl. Don't bring her in here."

At that moment, Doris came into the room, holding the hand of one of the attendants. Her eyes sought her father. When, at length, she saw him, all the pretty colour left her face. In spite of what I had told her in my effort to prepare her for his changed appearance, I could see that she was stunned at the havoc which the weeks had wrought.

"May I speak to my daddy?" she whispered, as I went over to her.

"Only a moment, dear child. Remember that you are going to be a brave little girl and answer all my questions so that all these people can hear you. You and I are the only two persons who can help your father."

"I'll remember," she promised.

I led her over to her father's side. In another second, they were sobbing in each other's arms. I

waited a minute, and then I put my hand on Strickland's shoulder.

"Come, Strickland, this won't do. Come, Doris, remember your promise, come and sit up in that chair there."

"No, no! Take her out of here. She's all I have left to me."

"Up there, Doris."

I took her by the hand and led her to the witness chair.

"Your Honour," said Strickland in a last desperate effort, "I want to keep my child out of this. It's the only request I've made. You're a man, Your Honour, a father, perhaps—"

"I am powerless to help you," said the Judge gravely. "I am merely an instrument of the law which will mete out justice to you. The law must be permitted to take its course. Proceed, Mr. Arbuckle."

Strickland sank into his chair. He buried his face in his arms spread out on the table before him. Not once while the child was on the stand did he alter his position.

"Your Honour," said the District Attorney, "I

respectfully ask that the competency of this child to testify be determined."

"By all means, Your Honour," I hastened to agree.

Again, Judge Dinsmore leaned forward from behind his desk. His tone was unwontedly gentle.

"How old are you, Doris?"

The child gave him one of those quick appraising glances with which children accost strangers. Apparently, she was satisfied with the result of her scrutiny, for she gave him a brave little smile, and answered in a clear voice which could readily be heard in any part of the crowded room.

"I'm going to be nine years old on the 6th of November."

"And do you go to school?"

"Yes, sir. I was promoted. I'm in the Grammar School now."

"Did you ever go to Sunday school?"

"Yes, sir. I went every Sunday before—before my mamma went away. But now my Aunt Helen won't let me go, because all the children talk about me and make me cry."

"Did you learn in Sunday school that you must always tell the truth?"

"Yes, sir. That's one of the Ten Commandments. 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' That means that you should never tell a lie. Miss Weston told us that."

"Who is Miss Weston?"

"She's my Sunday school teacher. She taught me all of the Ten Commandments. Shall I say them for you?"

"Not now."

The Judge turned to the District Attorney with a smile.

"I think she may testify. Proceed, Mr. Arbuckle."

I crossed over in front of the table where I could be nearer.

"Doris, what is your full name?"

"Doris Helen Strickland."

"Who is your father?"

"That's my daddy there."

She stood up as if she were about to run back to him, but I stopped her with a warning look, to remind her of her promise.

"Robert Strickland is your father?"

"Yes, sir."

"Doris, do you remember the night on which Mr. Trask was shot?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had your father been away from home?"

"Yes, sir. He was away in Cleveland. Buying a house for my mamma and me to live in."

"And he came back that evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, just before he came home, where were you?"

"I was in our sitting room."

"That was about half-past seven, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what were you doing?"

"I was waiting for Daddy."

"Yes, I know. But were you reading, or playing, or sitting still?"

"I was practising my piano lesson part of the time."

"And then?"

"And then I remembered that my mamma was lying down resting, and I stopped."

"And what did you do then?"

"I went and sat behind the end of the sofa and played with my dolls until Mamma came in to telephone to the man about the purse she had lost."

At the table behind me, I could hear Strickland stir uneasily, but he did not lift his head.

Through all that long story which we had gone over together again and again, I led the poor child. There were times when she hesitated; times when she appealed to me with a look to spare her from the long and harrowing ordeal to which I was asking her to submit. After the preliminary questions and answers I was careful to stand so that she could not catch even a glimpse of her father's bowed head. I was more afraid for him than for her. I knew that I had succeeded in instilling into her childish mind that she was doing it all to help her "daddy." I felt sure that I could count upon her loyal devotion to him. But it was too much to suppose that she would be proof against the strain of his making another of his passionate appeals to the Court.

How much of the story that she was telling he

took in, I had no means of judging. But from time to time the choking sound that I heard from the table behind me made me apprehensive that he was nearing the breaking point. At all costs, I must get Doris' story before the Jury. Once established that the motive for shooting Gerald Trask had nothing to do with the disappearance of the money in his safe, I felt that Strickland had a chance for his life.

True, he had asserted and reiterated that his life was valueless in his own eyes. No doubt he had justification for thinking so. Nevertheless, I believed that, should he escape being called upon to pay the extreme penalty of the law, the day would yet dawn when he would be thankful to have done so, if only for the sake of his brave little daughter.

Not that I imagined for a moment that the child before me in the least comprehended the significance of the shameful history I was dragging from her reluctant lips. To impute such knowledge to an innocent little girl would be monstrous. But it was none the less a hideous and frightful experience for her. The shock and terror of the

circumstances surrounding the disappearance of both her parents was with her still.

Added to this, the meeting with her father, the dreadful change in his appearance, the mystery which enveloped everything connected with him, the uncertainty as to when they were going to be united again coupled with the total disappearance of her equally loved mother only added to the strain under which she was labouring.

At last we were nearing the end. The child had done marvels. I could not have asked for a better witness. Upon the few occasions when she had faltered, I had only to admonish her with an upraised finger—the signal we had agreed upon—and she found new courage to go on.

We had come to that point in her narrative when her frantic mother had attempted to get Gerald Trask on the telephone and had snatched her child in her arms hysterically calling her by every endearing name that her distracted mind could suggest, when Doris broke down utterly.

“I’m afraid! I’m afraid!” she sobbed.

“Don’t cry, Doris. I won’t be much longer. Whom did your mother call up?”

"Mr. Trask. But he wasn't there."

"How do you know he wasn't there?"

"Because Mamma said: 'I will call again.' "

"Then what did she do?"

"She cried, and walked up and down the room, and said lots of terrible things."

"What did she say?"

"She said: 'Why didn't I tell him! Why didn't I tell him!' "

"What then?"

"Then I cried, too, because I was frightened. I wanted to talk to her, but she wouldn't. I was awfully afraid. I'm afraid now."

"Don't cry, Doris. It will only be a few minutes longer. Then we'll be through with you."

But, for the time being, she had completely lost her self-control.

"I want my mamma!"

"Try not to cry. Just a little while longer. That's a good girl. Are you listening to me?"

"Yes, sir," said the poor child, choking back a sob.

"Did your mother call up again?"

"Yes, sir. And she said: 'Is that you, Gerald

Trask?' I don't want to talk any more. My head hurts and I'm afraid!"

"Don't be afraid. We'll be finished in a moment. Your mother said: 'Is that you, Gerald Trask?'—"

"Yes, sir."

"What happened then?"

"Then—then—oh, I don't know."

"Yes, you do, Doris. Just try to think. You've told me about it a great many times."

"I don't remember."

"Try to think a moment. Be a brave girl. Did you hear a noise through the telephone?"

"Yes, sir."

Here, the District Attorney saw fit to interrupt us.

"If the Court please, I must insist that my friend refrain from leading the witness."

"I submit, Your Honour, that the child is labouring under a terrific strain, and that I must be allowed some latitude."

"Try not to lead the witness," admonished the Court.

"You say you heard a noise, Doris?"

"Yes, sir."

"What kind of a noise was it?"

"I don't know. A funny noise. Like a little firecracker."

"And what did your mother do when she heard the noise?"

"She screamed and said: 'My God, he's killed him!' Please let me go. I don't want to talk any more."

"Just one more question, and you'll be all through."

"I don't want to."

"What did your mother do after she said: 'My God, he's killed him'?"

"She took me in her arms and kissed me and said: 'Good-bye.' And I cried because it hurt when she kissed me."

"Did she go away then?"

"Yes."

"And have you seen your mother since that night?"

"No, no! And I want to see her," said the child, sobbing afresh.

"Do you know where she is?"

"No, no. Please tell me. I want to see her. I want to see her. Daddy dear," she left her chair and started down the steps of the witness stand, "why did you make my mamma cry and run away from me?"

I caught her in my arms, and turned and faced the Court.

"That's the child's story, Your Honour!"

"For God's sake, you're torturing my little baby!" cried Strickland, unable to contain himself any longer.

"I move that the child's testimony be stricken out," said the District Attorney stormily.

"Mr. Strickland, silence!" The Judge rapped with his gavel.

"You're torturing my little girl!" repeated Strickland wildly.

And so ended the first day of the trial.

CHAPTER XI

A RETURN FROM THE GRAVE

THE strain had been greater than I realised. After leaving the court, I went over to the little suite of offices which I have always kept, more as a matter of form in order to have a business address than for any real necessity, and throwing myself down on the couch which stands in the smaller, or "private" office, slept heavily for more than an hour.

When I awoke with that heavy feeling that I always have upon the rare occasions when I attempt to sleep in the daytime, I found that it lacked but a few moments till my dinner hour. I could not possibly arrive home on time. As punctuality is a thing I have always insisted upon in regulating my house, particularly in regard to the hours for meals, I decided that, rather than arrive even a few minutes late, I would send word that I was detained down town.

Accordingly I telephoned McLean to that effect,

and prepared to go out to some neighbouring restaurant for my dinner. I felt curiously relieved once I had come to this decision. It was only while I was combing my hair before the little mirror in the wash-room that I succeeded in analysing the feeling of reluctance that I had for going home. It was McLean I dreaded to meet.

By this time he would have devoured every word in the evening papers on the subject of the trial. And while, of course, he would never broach the subject himself, he would know how to make his reticence as eloquent as an interrogation point endowed with life! I could feel the question in his eyes fastened on my back as he stood behind my chair. And in my present mood, I felt that that was more than I could bear. After I had had my dinner, and had recovered from the effects of my nap, I would feel differently. I had no intention of staying down town late. I had too much to do on the morrow.

As I stepped out into the street, my ears were assailed by the raucous cries of the newsboys, hawking their wares.

“Wexta, wexta! All about the Robert Strick-

land case! Child of accused man on stand!" and so forth, and so forth.

I would have liked to put my hands over my ears!

At the door of the restaurant where I always go upon the rare occasions when I eat down town—for the reason that the proprietor was formerly the steward of my club, and I am always sure of particular attention—I was suddenly seized with a sort of nervous panic. If I went in there, where there were sure to be a number of people who would know of my connection with the Strickland case, they would certainly want to talk about it. I might just as well dine at home under McLean's accusing and reproachful eye. I turned and fled.

I think I must have walked a mile before I found anything that attracted me. Several times I was on the point of entering places when my eye would fall upon some one sitting at a table who resembled some one I know. That was enough. Positively I was getting morbid on the subject of avoiding my acquaintances. I fully realised that it was a matter of tired nerves, and therefore made

no attempt to combat my impulse for seclusion as I would otherwise have done.

At length, I woke up to the appreciation that I was both hungry and physically tired. I formed the childish resolution of going into the third restaurant I came to no matter how unattractive it might appear. Fortune was better to me than I deserved. The third restaurant proved to be a clean, albeit modest, affair somewhat on the order of a bakery.

The dishes listed on the bill-of-fare were of the simple and wholesome variety. I found no difficulty in making a selection that appealed to me. Moreover, when they arrived, they proved to be well cooked, and neatly served by a pleasant-faced woman who looked as if she might have been of German origin.

However, if I hoped to escape hearing of the Strickland case, I was doomed to disappointment. Whether the few people in the restaurant were friends or acquaintances, I, naturally, had no means of knowing. But, in any case, they discussed the case from table to table with an extraordinary fervour. In the three quarters of an

hour which I took for the consummation of my dinner, I certainly listened to some remarkable theories, many of which would have aroused the ire of McLean.

As far as I could gather, popular sympathy was about equally divided between the widow of Gerald Trask and Strickland. To my unbounded astonishment, Trask's reputation for philandering seemed to be quite as well known to the patrons of this obscure little restaurant as it was in the circles in which he had moved during his lifetime. I found food for thought in the discovery.

Another curious thing was that, without exception, it was the women that hoped that Strickland might get off. The men, while free to confess that in the light of the day's revelations, he had done what any man might naturally do in the circumstances, seemed to be in favour of his paying the penalty of his act. While they did not phrase it that way, I gathered that they felt it would be a bad thing for public morals generally, if he were to go free, or even if he were to escape with a term of imprisonment.

Opinion was divided on the subject of Doris

having been put on the stand. It was flattering to learn that it was one of the shrewdest tricks that any lawyer had "gotten away with"—I think I have the phrase correctly—for a very long time. The only thing that seemed to be at all comparable with it, in the mind of one of my critics, was a piece of sharp practice lately indulged in by one of the most disreputable and notorious persons who ever brought the practice of law into disrepute. I may add that he was disbarred shortly after the same brilliant achievement.

But the preponderance of the opinion was in our favour. Doris was declared to be a fine, brave child. (As indeed she was.) And I came in for some praise for the bold tactics I had adopted, and the skill I had displayed in building up a case out of so little promising material.

I left the restaurant to find to my surprise that I had lingered there nearly twice as long as I had intended. With the hope that the exercise might remove the last traces of sluggishness from my brain—for I had still much to do before I slept—I decided to walk home, taking it slowly and easily so as not to tire myself unnecessarily.

As I went up the steps, I looked at my watch. Ten o'clock! I had intended being home long before. I had just taken my key out of my pocket, when McLean opened the door.

"What has happened?" I cried, after one look at his face.

"It's Mrs. Strickland, sir."

"Mrs. Strickland! Good Heavens, let me see. I haven't read a paper."

I pointed to the pile of evening papers on the stand.

"There's nothing about her in the papers. She's here."

"Here! McLean, have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Mayhap I have," he said stubbornly. "But I still had them when I showed her up to the library."

"The library?" I echoed stupidly.

"Yes, sir. I took her up there on account of the big couch. She was hardly able to stand. There's a hospital nurse with her."

I could only lean weakly against the hat-stand, and stare at him. If my life had depended on my

doing anything for the next few seconds, it would have been forfeited.

"Tell me about it," I managed finally.

"There's nothing to tell. The bell rang. I went to the door. Taxi standing in front of the house. Chauffeur wanting to know if Mr. Malcolm Arbuckle lived here. When he finds out, goes back to taxi. He and nurse help a lady out and up the steps. She says she's Mrs. Robert Strickland. When she finds you're not in, says she'll wait. Nurse stays with her."

"McLean," I said, "go up and tell them that I have returned, and that I will see them inside of five minutes. And then come back and give me a high ball. I'll be in the dining-room."

And in the dining-room he found me on his return, sitting in the darkness. I hadn't the strength to turn on the lights.

The nurse met me outside of the door.

"I must explain before you see her," she began in quite her professional manner, "that Mrs. Strickland has been lying at the point of death ever since the—the—"

"The night of the murder," I finished for her,

seeing that she seemed to have difficulty in getting out the word.

"Exactly. She has had brain fever. Only a few days ago, she was still delirious the greater part of the time. She was to have been allowed to sit up for the first time to-morrow."

"And she's here? Now?"

"She's here, now."

It was too much for me. I could only shake my head in silent protest against these two irreconcilable statements.

"And what possessed her to come here? If she has been ill as you say, how could she have kept track of things? How, for example, did she know that I was defending her husband?"

"It all came about through a lapse in discipline on the part of two of the nurses," she said severely. "They had read about the little girl, you know, in the evening papers. And supposing that Mrs. Strickland was asleep because she was lying there with her eyes closed, they were talking it over in a corner of the Ward.

"But Mrs. Strickland wasn't asleep. She heard

every word they said. She opened her eyes and asked them several questions about it. And then she suddenly sat up in her bed—she that hadn't had the strength to hardly turn herself for weeks—and insisted upon seeing the doctor.

“When he came to see what was wanted, she told him that the name she had given us, May Deane, was her maiden name. That she was really Mrs. Robert Strickland and that the little girl they had been talking about was *her* child, and that the man on trial was *her* husband.

“She insisted upon coming to see you, and she says she's going to the court to-morrow, and that what she has to tell will free her husband. There was nothing to do but let her. And the doctor gave me my orders to come with her.”

“But she can't go to court until I hear what she is willing to testify to.”

“That's what she's come for; to tell you her story.”

“And you mean to tell me that a woman as sick as you say she has been has had the strength to do all this?”

“It would seem so.”

"Well, all I can say is that I don't understand it."

"I guess you don't understand much about women," said the nurse dryly.

There seemed to be nothing further to say on that head.

"Shall we go on in, or do you wish to tell her that I am here?"

"I will just go in and speak to her first. You must remember that she is very weak. She may not be able to tell her story very connectedly. But you will be patient with her I am sure. Will you wait a moment?"

"Certainly."

It seemed only a second until she was back. Holding the door open for me, she signed for me to go in ahead of her.

It was curious how the whole room seemed strange and unfamiliar. And yet nothing had been changed in any way. I could not see that even a chair had been displaced. Was it the mere presence of a hospital nurse in her severely plain uniform that made the difference? The room seemed also unaccountably dim. But I soon saw

that it was owing to the fact that the nurse had improvised a screen for my reading lamp to keep the light from the eyes of the woman on the couch.

And then I saw *her*. I had thought that I had seen the worst that grief could do when I had seen how suffering had stamped the face of Strickland. But I had not then seen his wife. For a moment my heart seemed to have stopped beating. It did not seem possible that she could be alive. I found myself vainly searching that ghastly face, emaciated to an unbelievable degree and of an incomparable pallor, for any resemblance to the pictured face I had carried about with me for days, and finding none. Only her eyes were alive. All there was of life was concentrated in them.

Mechanically I took the chair which the nurse silently placed beside the couch. I recalled afterwards that I never thought of any of the conventional formalities. It never occurred to me, for example, to introduce myself. Nor was I conscious of wishing to say anything. How long I sat, silently meeting the steady glow of those burning eyes, I have not the least idea.

It was she who eventually broke the silence, if the silence could be said to be broken by the faint whisper which was her voice.

"Robert; how does he bear it?"

"He is wonderful," I said.

"And my baby? Where is she?"

"She is at her aunt's."

"At Helen's; I am glad of that. She was—there to-day."

"Yes. I made it as easy for her as I could."

"She is brave, like him."

The nurse went over to the corner of the room. My eyes had by now accustomed themselves to the semi-darkness, and I saw that there were some medicines and glasses standing on the *étagère*. The nurse gave her something to drink out of one of them.

"Will you come a little closer, please? I haven't quite got my strength yet, and I must save my voice for to-morrow. I want to tell you my story."

Save herself for to-morrow! I glanced up at the nurse. My face must have expressed my incredulity. I moved up closer to the woman on

the couch, and bent over her that I might catch her faintest word.

I am not going to attempt to tell the story as she told it to me then. It came brokenly and haltingly from her lips. There were times when she was obliged to stop and rest. There were times when, at a sign from the nurse, I begged her to do so, or made an excuse to get up and pace the floor. Although I did not realise it at the time, I was sitting in a cramped position. But the next day, and for several days afterwards, my back was sore and lame.

But it was only in the manner of the telling, that the story halted. In itself, it was singularly clear and direct; at least, all that part of it that had to do with her first meeting with Gerald Trask. When it came to the events of the night of the murder, their sequence seemed to be indistinct in her mind. I was frequently obliged to stop her, and put some question when some statement that she made seemed to me to be obscure, or when it failed to tally with the account I had had from Doris.

It was nearly midnight, when acting on the

nurse's suggestion, I withdrew for an hour to give Mrs. Strickland an opportunity to rest. At the door, we had another brief conference.

"Of course, it is madness to think of her attempting to appear in court to-morrow."

"I think she will find strength to go."

"It doesn't look as if she could *possibly* find the strength to do it."

"It doesn't look as if she could possibly find the strength to stay away."

Again I felt that I was being snubbed.

When I returned shortly after one, it was to find that the short hour's rest had worked a really remarkable change. The nurse informed me that her patient had slept nearly the whole time. No doubt the relief she drew from having taken the first step to save her husband contributed largely to her improvement. Certainly, her voice was noticeably stronger, and I even thought that her face appeared less waxen.

The dawn was finding its way through the drawn shades, when we had finished. I had ordered a room prepared for Mrs. Strickland and the nurse which was on the same floor with the

library. Having assisted her as far as the door, I left her to take a much-needed rest. It was arranged that she would be ready to go with me to the court a little before ten.

The part of her story which was entirely new to me, I will tell later as she herself told it on the witness stand. I can only say that it changed entirely the aspect of the case.

But that part of it which dealt with the night of June 24th, and her wanderings after she left her house, belongs here.

CHAPTER XII

AN OMINOUS ENCOUNTER

As I already knew, she had sent her child to pass the day with her sister. It was not an unusual thing for her to have done. Frequently, when she had any great amount of shopping to do, or when, upon rare occasions, she and her husband were able to plan some little outing together—for in spite of the years that had gone by since their marriage, they were lovers still, and embraced all opportunities that offered to take long walks in the country where they could be quite by themselves—Bertha would be told that she could take Miss Doris up to her aunt's and then have the rest of the day to herself.

They did not always go to the country. Sometimes they would "do" a museum instead, or even go to a theatre, pretending that they were a country bride and groom off on their honeymoon in the great city. They would finish the day with

dinner at some restaurant, or go home and have a picnic supper which they would get themselves.

It was from intimate little touches like this which frequently came out in her story that I saw how happy they had been, and how united they were. They had been selfishly absorbed in each other, she acknowledged that. She even saw comparatively little of her only living sister; but there were other reasons for that besides her devotion to her husband.

The sisters had never had a quarrel in their lives. But about one thing, they had finally agreed to disagree. Mrs. Strickland's resolution to keep from her husband the knowledge of a tragedy which had shadowed her youth, did not meet with the elder woman's approval.

As they were both women of unusual force of character, neither would give way in the matter. And while long ago they had mutually resolved never to re-open the subject, it was ever present in the mind of each when they were together, and gradually raised up a certain barrier between them.

Another subject upon which they were com-

pletely out of sympathy, and which, also, was never alluded to, was Mrs. Stanwood's only child, a young man in the early twenties who, according to Mrs. Strickland, was about as worthless as he well could be.

Spoiled and indulged all through his childhood by his widowed mother—even so strong a woman as Mrs. Stanwood has her weak point, and this child was her's—his idle and dissipated habits made him a constant drain upon her modest resources, as well as a continued ground for anxiety. Mrs. Strickland confessed that she could never even think of him without irritation; attributing, as she did, her sister's ill-health entirely to worry on his account.

I do not mean to convey the idea that she told me all these things in the form in which I am relating them. She was, most probably on account of her weakness, continually halting her narrative for the purpose of going back to pick up some forgotten thread, or to cite some instance or anecdote which in her judgment might serve the purpose of illumination.

It was as if she had wished to paint for me in

words a picture of their happiness up to the time when her husband left on that last, and as it was to turn out, fatal visit to the West. If that were her purpose she certainly succeeded.

I have rarely if ever in my life encountered a family so absolutely united as the family of Robert Strickland seemed to have been. They perhaps laid themselves open to criticism on the ground that they were too self-centred. They had few if any interests outside of their home, each other, and their child.

Strickland was one of the most domestic of men. And like most men of his type he might be said to have been almost dependent upon his wife in many little ways. At all events, she it was who screened and protected him from all the little petty annoyances which assail the average man every day of his life. He had no secrets from her. She encouraged him to talk of his business. And, since she was a woman of unusual intelligence, it was not long before she had made herself mistress of the smallest detail of his affairs.

She assured me, and I had no reason to doubt her word or to think that she was self-deceived in

the matter, that her husband never embarked upon any enterprise, or took any momentous step without first talking the whole matter over with her. And it was the rarest thing in the world for him to act contrary to her advice.

As the years flowed on thus smoothly, the terror that ever lurked in the deep recesses of her mind and heart gradually became less and less of a menace to her new found security and happiness. Not that she was not constantly on her guard. And the strain of this unceasing vigil was bound to tell upon a nervous system as highly organised as hers.

There were times when, without any real cause, it would rear its unlovely head. There were whole days when she gave herself up to despair. But however much she suffered, when her husband returned at night, he always found her the gay and cheerful companion that he had always known; ready to enter into his mood whatever it might be.

She had fought the whole question out with herself before she had consented to marry him. In the end, she had decided—and in coming to this

conclusion, she had been largely influenced by the consciousness that, beyond the fact that she had cruelly deceived an indulgent and loving parent she had been guilty of no wrongdoing—that the happiness and peace of mind of the man she loved would be shattered by the revelation which she would have to make if she took him completely into her confidence.

It was characteristic of her that, having once made a decision, she should never waver from it. A thing once settled, was settled for all time. Knowing her husband's domestic tastes, and how little he cared for society, she had made it the business to make his home so attractive that he rarely, if ever, wished to spend his time elsewhere.

Once only in all their married life up to the time when he was forced to make several journeys to the West to arrange the details of his new business venture, had they been separated. That was the time shortly before Doris was born. The years of strain to which she had subjected herself combined with her condition at that time had so worked upon her overwrought imagination that she became positively obsessed with the idea that

she could not longer guard her precious secret unless she went away.

She had left a letter for her husband telling him that she was going away for a week, and begging him not to attempt to find her and follow her. This done, she had gone to the people who long ago had helped nurse her through a long and terrible illness. They were old friends of her family and had known of her earlier trouble. She had arrived at the point when she felt that she must have some one in whom to confide her fears, and who would be wholly sympathetic as her sister, in the circumstances, could not be.

Strickland had been nearly mad with anxiety when he found her letter. He had rushed away to Mrs. Stanwood, who had at once suspected the truth. Telling him that there was no real cause for alarm, and that she was sure she would have news for him within a few hours—she had to this extent lent herself to the deception of which she so strongly disapproved—she had started at once for the little country place which had before proved a real asylum to the afflicted woman. At the end of a week she had suc-

ceeded in persuading the unhappy woman to return, and had managed to allay her fears that there was any greater possibility of her betraying herself than there would have been in ordinary circumstances.

With the birth of her child, Mrs. Strickland's happiness had seemed well-nigh complete. She had longed to bear a son, but her husband's delight that the child was a girl, coupled with the fact that the baby so strongly resembled her father, had mitigated her first disappointment.

For nearly nine years, they had known more happiness than falls to the lot of most mortals. She had even begun to delude herself that the spectre that had so long haunted her days was laid forever. And then one night at dinner, quite casually, he told her of having met Gerald Trask, the rich banker.

The very unexpectedness of the blow made it fall all the more heavily. She was never able to recall any detail of their conversation during the rest of the dinner. The old terror had hold on her. Mechanically she got through the rest of the meal in some fashion. With perfect truth she

was able to plead a "splitting headache" as an excuse for going immediately to bed.

All night long she had lain wide-eyed and sleepless by his side. He was an impulsive man of strong likes and dislikes. He had spoken of Trask with even more than his usual enthusiasm, expressing the hope that he might see more of him. How was she to prevent this without arousing his suspicion? Towards morning, overcome with weariness, she had a new terror to combat. What if she should fall asleep and in the overwrought state of her mind say something to betray herself? At intervals she arose to bathe her face in cold water in order to keep awake.

Her appearance the next morning after this exhausting vigil had been such as to alarm him. But she had quieted his fears by attributing it to the severity and duration of her headache. But she was to know no more peace after that night.

She had gone out the next day shortly after he left the house saying that she would not be back to luncheon. She passed the entire day in Central Park sitting on a bench, staring with unseeing

eyes over the grassy lawns, planning, scheming, contriving some way to ward off the threatened danger. For now she had the happiness and security of two people to fight for—her child, and her husband.

And with it all was the new and overmastering dread that she no longer possessed the strength to fight any more. The long strain had told on her too much. What if she should break down at this, the eleventh hour! She tried to tell herself that she was exaggerating her danger. This casual meeting might never lead to anything. The very fact that her husband and Gerald Trask moved in different worlds, and had so little in common would seem to make any prospect of their ever growing intimate sufficiently remote. To be sure there was her husband's avowed intention to follow up the acquaintance. She never remembered to have seen him quite so enthusiastic over meeting any one before.

It was singular, this sudden liking. She had heard somewhere that Gerald Trask was not a man's man. That he never took any pains to disguise the fact that men, as a rule, did not interest

him. And yet he must have gone out of his way to have interested Robert so greatly.

And then a sudden, terrifying thought struck her. *Did he know?* Was there something sinister behind it all? Did he know that she was Robert Strickland's wife? Did he know? Did he know? Did he know? It would be like him to revenge himself upon her in this fashion, to punish her after all these years!

She reached home just before dinner in a more exhausted state than when she had left it. She had not even thought of food during the entire day. Fortunately he was unusually late, so that she had been able to make some slight change in her toilette before he returned.

He was in wonderfully high spirits. What did she suppose he had been doing all afternoon? Playing truant like the veriest schoolboy. And where, and with whom, did she suppose he had gone? She braced herself for the answer that she knew was coming. He had gone to a ball game with Gerald Trask.

She had managed a look of smiling indulgence for this peccadillo. "Why had he not told her

of this pleasant plan at breakfast?" Plan? There had been no plan about it. By the merest chance, he had bumped into Trask on returning from lunch. He, it seemed, was with his brother-in-law, whose home was in Chicago. They had made a bet on the ball game and were going up to see it. Why did not Strickland join them? There was no real reason why he shouldn't. So he had telephoned the office and had joined them.

And, by the way, wasn't it her turn to give an account of her day? He had telephoned the house at the same time to say that he might be a little late for dinner. And in place of hearing the voice of his dutiful wife, as he had expected, it was the maid who had replied. And what was more, she had said that her mistress had left the house right after breakfast, leaving word that she couldn't say just when she would be back.

She explained that she had gone up to the Park to see if the air might not do her good after her indisposition of yesterday. At once he was all remorse. Here he had been enjoying himself like a perfect kid and she had been having a

miserable time of it. But he had missed her, just the same. He had kept wishing that she was along. She must meet Trask. She would be sure to like him. He was married, too. Perhaps, a little later on, it would come about that the two wives would meet. If Mrs. Trask was half as good a fellow as her husband, their acquaintance would be a great acquisition for them both.

All evening long he could talk of nothing else but his new friend and the fine time he had had. It may be imagined what tortures the unhappy woman was compelled to endure with a smiling face.

Realising that she must obtain a little rest, her fear of betraying herself while asleep augmented rather than allayed, she had that night for the first time in all their married life occupied a separate room. Indeed she continued to do so for several weeks, on the ground that she was not feeling herself and that she was too nervous to sleep quietly and would only disturb him.

At the end of that time, she was a little less fearful, or perhaps she had become more accustomed to the weight of her old burden. At any

rate, she felt that she had herself once more in hand.

Then, too, she learned, with what relief may be imagined, that Trask had gone on an extended tour through the West to inspect some mining properties in which he had a large interest. She had reached the stage now when every day that she was without fear, was a day gained.

And then came her husband's business difficulties. It is unnecessary to go into the matter in this narrative. Suffice it to say that Strickland became involved through no fault of his own. It is certain that he was greatly worried. But to her—and she frequently reproached herself with selfishness—this new trial was a welcome relief. It gave her occupation for her mind. No detail of the complication was unknown to her. She counselled and advised with him on every slightest step.

Then came the welcome offer from Cleveland. It drove her almost delirious with joy. To her, it spelled escape. But she could not fire her husband with her own enthusiasm. It was an experiment at best. And he did not feel that a man

with a wife and child had the right to make experiments. For the first time in her life, now that she had so much at stake, she found that her influence was not strong enough to over-ride his opposition.

In vain she pointed out that poverty meant nothing to her. The one thing in life that counted was that they should be together. What difference where it was? What if they should have to scrimp and save for a year or two? It would give her the opportunity she had often longed for; to show him what a thoroughly good housewife she really was. But, no. His man's pride took alarm at the idea of having to reduce their scale of living. He would not hear of her having to do her own work. In the first place she was not strong enough for it. And then, how it would look!

Then there was another reason. If he accepted the offer, he would have to go leaving debts behind. Of course they could be paid off later, if everything turned out as well as it promised. But, just the same, he didn't like to go away and leave them. With what he would be able to save from

the wreck of his business, and ten thousand dollars more, he could face the world a free man with enough of a surplus to give him heart for the new venture. He went on to Cleveland to see if it could be arranged. But the best he could do was to obtain a promise that the money would be forthcoming a little later. With the fulfilment of this promise as a condition, he closed with the Cleveland people, and their departure in a few weeks' time seemed an assured fact.

In the meantime, Trask's return was the signal of a renewal of their intimacy. Marking time, as he was more or less doing, Strickland had more leisure for meeting his friend. Several times he suggested their asking him to dinner. But she always managed to make some excuse. Finally, he one day playfully threatened to bring him home some night unexpectedly to take "Pot Luck" with them.

This was too much. It may be said to have been the occasion of their first serious quarrel. She became absolutely hysterical, and reproached him bitterly with a lack of consideration. He was both frightened and astonished at this out-

burst, which, however, he fortunately attributed to fatigue and nerves.

But she was to have a still narrower escape. He was as determined as ever to bring about a meeting between his wife and his friend. Chancing to meet Trask one day in the middle of the afternoon not far from the house, he had insisted on carrying him off home if only for a quarter of an hour to meet the finest little woman in the world.

As it happened she had been indoors all day sewing on some garments for the child. Seeing that she was about to run short of some necessary material, and wishing to finish the garment before dinner time, she had slipped out herself to replenish her supply of the desired article at a little shop in the neighbourhood. She had just turned the corner on her way back, when she saw her husband and Gerald Trask going up the steps of the apartment house.

She had darted into the hall-way of the apartment across the street. From that safe shelter she had watched her own house until she saw Trask come out. She looked greedily to see what

changes time had written upon his face. She had to confess to herself that he looked as he had always looked.

Having given the coloured hall-boy a half dollar, which she rightly judged he would consider the most satisfactory explanation for her visit, she went across to her home. Curiously enough, she regarded this narrow escape as a good omen.

But she was not to keep her faith in omens for long. The next evening her husband told her that he had come to an arrangement with Trask, whereby Trask was to advance the necessary ten thousand dollars, taking Strickland's note at thirty days for the same.

"Robert, Robert, how could you without at first telling me!" was all she could find to say.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRICE OF SAFETY

THAT was on the 22nd of May.

The effect of this new complication was lightened by the news that Trask had gone away on another trip. Southward this time, to inspect some railroads. Nevertheless, she saw May melt into June, and June draw towards the important 22nd with a feeling of uneasiness and bewilderment.

Never had she known her husband to take a business obligation with such seeming lightness. Upon the several occasions when she had questioned him as to where he was to find funds to meet the note, he had answered that the Cleveland people were sure to "come through" before that; and if they didn't, Trask was too good a fellow to push things.

The truth of the matter was that he was secretly considerably worried over the delay in getting his Cleveland matters settled up. But think-

ing that she had enough to contend with in supervising all the many preparations for so important a move, he had made up his mind that, come what might, she should not have the matter of the meeting of the note added to her load. (This, I may add, I learned later from the lips of Strickland himself. But it seems only just that I should mention it here.)

It is only natural that in the state of mind in which Mrs. Strickland found herself, she should have read all sorts of meanings into her husband's unusual actions. Why should he count on any special leniency in a man whose reputation for hardness in business dealings was proverbial? She could find no answer to the question.

Or again: was it not that Trask's evil influence—and she knew that his influence could never be anything *but* evil—was acting on her husband in a way to lead him to consult less with his wife about business affairs? She knew there were men who never took their wives into their confidence, who deprecated women meddling with business, as they described it. And Trask, she felt sure, would be just the man to hold with such opinions.

And while she was taxing her brain with these and similar questions, the 22nd was drawing nearer.

Whether it was on the nineteenth, or the twentieth that Strickland decided suddenly to go again to Cleveland, Mrs. Strickland could not recall. The fact of her inability to do so seemed to worry her greatly, but I assured her that in my opinion it was of no great importance. If it turned out that it should be, I had no doubt that the exact date would come back to her at need.

As a matter of fact she was covering a great deal of important ground in her own way, which was just what I wanted. Providing always that she was not deceiving herself in believing that she would be able to be present at the trial the following day, I would know how to confine her recital to the points I wanted.

At all events, on the spur of the moment, he decided to go. When she ventured to remind him that the note would fall due before the day he was planning for his return, he lightly dismissed the matter, saying he would drop Trask a line explaining that he had been unexpectedly called out.

of town, and would take up the note on his return, which would not be later than the 24th.

There were one or two little matters that he left for his wife to attend to. Among them, was the question of the bids of two rival firms engaged in the business of packing and moving household furniture. In Strickland's judgment both bids were too high. He had telephoned both of the houses, making them a final offer. They had promised to take the matter under advisement, and let him know their decision immediately. If they wrote him to the house, she was to open the letters and decide the matter for herself. But, for some reason or other, he fancied that their representatives would be more likely to call in person.

It was on the evening of the 22nd, while she was lying down in her own room, that the maid came to her to say that some one had called to see Mr. Strickland. Before saying that he was out of town, she had waited to consult her mistress.

If she had not believed that Gerald Trask was still in the South, she might have sent the maid back with a question as to his name and business.

Even if she had remembered that it was the 22nd—and she confessed that the day of the month was the thing furthest from her mind—she might have been more on her guard.

But as it was, she supposed that it was a man from one of the two furniture houses. Sending back word that Mr. Strickland was from home, but that Mrs. Strickland would be with him in a minute, she stopped only long enough to glance in the mirror to see if she had disarranged her hair in lying down, and went across the hall to the little drawing-room.

And there, standing with his back to the mantel-piece, facing the door, stood Gerald Trask.

Of the two, he was the more astonished. Mrs. Strickland never doubted that. He could never have simulated such genuine amazement. She had an impulse to fly to the shelter of her own room and lock herself in, to shriek for the maid to come to her assistance. But if her life had depended upon it, she could not have called for help, much less moved.

“By God! If it isn’t little May Deane!” said Gerald Trask.

And then, while she watched him with terrified, fascinated eyes, he suddenly began to laugh. It was a dreadful laugh. For it was a laugh without sound. He was so convulsed with silent merriment that his face became crimson, his breath came in great gasps, his body shook with this horrible, silent mirth until perforce, he had to bury his distorted face in his hands, turning his back on her and resting his elbows on the mantel-piece in front of him. When he turned to her again, he was fumbling in his pocket to find his handkerchief to wipe his streaming eyes.

And as she watched the progress of this horrible paroxysm, whatever little spark of hope still burned in her breast, flickered and died. Only a beast incarnate could have laughed like that!

"One moment," she found herself saying. "I wish to give my maid an order."

She went out to the kitchen, and told Bertha to give the child her supper. She would let her know when she was ready for her own dinner. She would be engaged with her caller for some little time.

When she returned, he was sitting very erect

in the tall chair by the writing desk. At the sight of her, he showed symptoms of a return of his fearful mirth. But the look in her face checked him.

"So you are the wife of my dear friend, Robert Strickland?"

"Yes," she said, "I am Robert Strickland's wife. What then?"

"What then?" he mocked. "I haven't decided yet. But you must admit it's a stupendous joke."

"I fear I haven't your keen sense of humour," she said icily.

And then she added: "What brings you here to his house?"

She was affecting a courage she was far from feeling. In another moment, she realised her mistake. An evil look which she remembered only too well came into his eyes.

"It occurs to me that *in the circumstances* you are treating yourself to a good many airs," he sneered.

"In the circumstances?"

"Yes. Perhaps you do not know that I hold

your husband's note for ten thousand dollars, and that that note is due to-day?"

"Yes," she said, "I know all about it."

"No doubt he left the money with you, then."

"No. He left me no money. But he wrote you that he had been called away, and that he would return by the 24th and take up the note."

"I haven't been to the bank. As a matter of fact, I just stepped off the train within the hour. I was on my way home when I remembered about the note. I little knew the delightful surprise that was waiting for me."

He left his chair to cross over where he could stand looking down at her. It seemed an eternity before he spoke again.

"But having found this delightful surprise, I have changed my mind in regard to the note. It is to *you* that I will look for the payment."

"To me?"

"Yes; to you."

Again a long silence fell between them.

"I haven't forgotten the damnable scrape you got me into once; the worst scrape I ever got into

in all my life. And it was you and your damned old father that got me into it!"

"Don't," she protested. "My poor father died—shortly afterwards. It killed him."

"I wish he'd died before ever I saw him," he said brutally. "I tell you, it cost me a pretty penny, and the worst of it is I haven't done paying yet. Every time my delightful wife and I have a rumpus—which is about once in six weeks, or so—she rakes the whole thing up again; threatens divorce, and all that sort of thing. Of course, I can't let her do that. It might hurt me in a business way. People are such fools! So I have to buy her off, one way or another. I swore years ago that I would make you and your father pay for it. But now it seems you must pay alone. I always keep my word."

"You've changed, then." For the life of her, she couldn't have kept back the words.

"Well, we'll let it go at that," he said.

Then he brutally told her *how* he would be paid. She begged and implored him to spare her. She actually went down on her knees to him. She might as well have knelt to the fire-irons.

He told her that he would ruin both her and her husband, financially, as well as every other way. He taunted her with the fact that her long silence only made it all the easier for him. What man would ever believe a woman who had deceived him for years, as she had done her husband? In her heart, she knew that he was right.

Before he left her, he went over to the writing-desk and wrote down the address of his house in Long Branch. She was to join him there the next day. *That* was his price.

Flinging the paper, on which he had written the address in her lap, he left her still sitting quietly in her big chair.

Presently she got up and going over to the desk, took from a drawer her little black velvet purse. Mechanically, she opened it, and dropped the paper inside. When she clicked it shut, the noise hurt her head.

CHAPTER XIV

A WOMAN AT BAY

SHE had returned on the 4.17 train.

On the way down in the morning, she had actually had a faint hope that he might only have brought her down to frighten her. He couldn't mean it, he couldn't! Such things didn't happen outside of penny-dreadfuls. There were bounds which even *he* would not dare to pass. He would remember that she was a mother now. And even if he were willing to dishonour his friend, he could not ask her to disgrace her child.

She did not dare ask her way at the station. She remembered vaguely that he had said that it wasn't far. She waited until she was a whole block away before she ventured to ask a boy driving a butcher cart.

Although she kept repeating to herself that it was only a cruel hoax—that this was his way of paying her off for the trouble that he chose to pretend she and her father had gotten him into

years before, her knees were knocking so that she could hardly go up the steps to the porch.

The return journey was a blank. She remembered finding her way blindly back to the station, and buying her ticket. Then some one had told her that the train just pulling in was the one she was to take. That was all.

In the same dazed way she must have engaged a taxi. She had no recollection of doing so. All she remembered was that she suddenly awoke to a consciousness that the hall-boy at her own house was holding open the door for her. She would have gone on in without even turning her head, had not the chauffeur reminded her that she had not paid her fare.

She searched her little hand-bag for her purse—she remembered afterwards that it was open—but it wasn't there. It was stupid of her; she certainly thought she had taken it with her in the morning. Telling the boy to pay the fare for her, and not to forget to give the chauffeur his tip, she went on upstairs, not waiting for the elevator.

Doris had greeted her rapturously. She had not seen her darling mamma since early that morn-

ing. And there was a letter that had Cleveland on it which had been waiting ever so long.

As she felt her child's lips on her own, she was taken with a fit of shuddering. Fortunately Doris was already running back to the kitchen to tell Bertha that her mother had returned.

Her eye fell on her husband's letter lying on the table before her. Doris was right. Cleveland was certainly stamped on it. Cleveland? Oh, yes; that was the place they had once thought of going to—*were* going to, before—

She opened the letter and read it straight through from end to end. It was not long. And then she realised that she had taken in nothing that she had read, but the one statement that he would be home on the following day, but not in time for dinner.

At this moment the child came back, dancing along the hall. She told her the good news, and at once she was besieged with questions as to when they would go away, what the new house was like, and whether or not Doris could take all her doll-babies with her on the train. To them all, she

said that she did not know. She would have to wait until Daddy came. He would tell her.

And then she explained that Mamma had one of her dreadful headaches, and didn't want any dinner, not even a cup of tea. She was going to bed. Bertha could give Doris her supper whenever it was ready. But she must be very quiet.

Once in her room, she tossed her hat and hand-bag on a chair, and then went over and locked the door. Without even taking off her shoes, she threw herself on the bed, her face buried in the pillows. And then, she let the storm sweep over her. It had taken her child's innocent kiss to bring her back to a realisation of what had happened!

It was nearly morning when she got up and undressed properly. She remembered to unlock her door before getting into bed. When Bertha, opening it ever so quietly, looked in on her at breakfast time, she was still sleeping heavily.

All day she felt heavy and languid. Doris was, of course, all excitement over her daddy's home-coming. Yes, she could sit up to see him,

but not for long. No, Mamma would not tell him anything about her having passed her examinations so well; Doris should tell him that herself.

In the afternoon, while Bertha was taking the child for her walk, she suddenly began to cry again. But she reminded herself that her husband was coming. She must stop crying and remove the traces of her tears. She had all her life to cry in. She could cry every day when she was alone. But now she must drive all thought of it out of her mind. She must be gay and cheerful, and try to interest herself in all the details of the new house he had written about. She hoped it didn't have steps leading up to a porch.

And she must begin right now to school herself. She must be more on her guard than ever before, until they should really get away from New York and everything connected with it. Oh, if they were only going still further! Far, far away, to another country, another continent, even. They could not go too far for her.

The first thing was to arrange in her mind what she had been doing all the day before. Oh, yes;

she had been shopping. How stupid of her to forget that that was the reason she had given for sending Doris up to her aunt's.

That reminded her that she must make a list of things that had to be bought for Doris. She might just as well make it out now while the needed articles were fresh in her mind. She went over to the little desk in the drawing-room.

The first thing her eye fell upon was a sheet of writing paper torn across the middle. The sheet upon which *he* had— Good God! That address in *his* writing was still in her purse. She rushed back to her room, forgetting her list.

Her hand-bag was still lying on the chair where she had tossed it when she came in the evening before. She plunged her hand into its depths, searching for her purse, her little black velvet purse with the gold clasp. It must be there. She turned out the contents of the hand-bag into her lap. But there was no sign of the purse.

She sprang to her feet, and began pacing up and down the room, her fingers pressed against her temples. She was going to be perfectly calm

about it. She was not going to let herself get excited. She must go back, step by step, until she could recall when she had had her purse last.

She had driven up from the station in a taxi. She remembered telling the boy downstairs to pay the fare for her. And she had told him to, because she had missed her purse then. *Now* she remembered that her hand-bag was open when she got out of the cab. The purse must have fallen out. But where? Where? When had she seen it last? Wait a minute. Now she had it, of course. When she was buying her ticket in the station at Long Branch. She must have dropped it then. She would telephone to the Station Master. That was the thing to do.

She was a long time getting him. It seemed as if everybody in the country had been inspired with the same desire to talk with the Station Master at Long Branch. When she did finally succeed, the result was not very satisfactory.

"Hello! Hello! Is this the Station Master at Long Branch?"

"This is Mrs. Robert Strickland of New York City speaking. Yes; Mrs. Robert Strickland.

S-t-r-i-c-k-l-a-n-d. That's right. Have you found a purse belonging to me? Describe it? Very well. A small black velvet— You say you haven't found *any* purse. Oh, this *isn't* the Station Master? Well, when *will* he be there? Very well; I'll call up later."

A quarter of an hour later, she called up again. This time she found the man she was asking for, but he had seen or heard nothing of her purse, which she told him contained about forty dollars in money and several of her cards. He referred her to the Lost Articles Clerk at the station in Jersey City.

In the meantime she had another idea. She might have lost it in the taxi. Calling up the hall boy she asked him if he could tell her to which company the cab belonged in which she had come home the day before. But a different boy was on duty. The other one would not be back until after six o'clock.

Bertha and Doris returning just then, put a stop to any further attempts for the time being. The excitement and worry had brought back her wretched headache. Having told Bertha to

darken her room, she went again to lie down for a while.

She must have fallen asleep, for when she looked at her watch, it was nearly time for her husband to be there. She must try to get the Jersey City man before he returned. Doris was not in the drawing-room. Probably she was out in the kitchen talking with Bertha.

This time she did not have to wait. The line was free. She told all the particulars of her loss, described the purse and its contents, laying particular stress that it held some extremely important memoranda, and wound up with saying that she thought that she had lost it at the station at Long Branch.

As she hung up the receiver, she screamed with fright. Doris was standing at her elbow. The child laughed merrily. To have so startled her mother seemed to her the greatest kind of a joke. After a second, she was able to join in her laughter; at least the counterfeit was sufficiently good to deceive the child.

And then she explained that on no account must Daddy be told of the loss of the purse. It

would only worry him, and do no good. The child promised, but one could see that she was puzzling her little head with some other question. Finally it came out. How could her mother have been at Long Branch when she had been shopping all day?

She hadn't. It was a friend of hers to whom she had lent the purse, who had lost it at Long Branch. She found herself almost stammering over this lie. She must learn to do better. She might have to tell dozens—hundreds—before she was through with it.

And then she heard the dearest voice in all the world out in the hall saying: "Hello, Bertha, how are you?"

In another moment she was in his arms.

Presently she discovered that he hadn't had his dinner after all. Doris had had hers especially early, and she, herself, had been contented with a cup of tea. For the last two days, food had choked her. She went out to the kitchen to superintend the getting of some sort of a lunch for him. While she was in the pantry the door bell rang. She heard Bertha go to answer it, but she was too

busily occupied with her own thoughts to remember to ask her who it had been.

Just as she had completed her preparations, Doris came running into the kitchen.

"Daddy says to tell you that Mr. Trask is here, and that you're to come on in."

Strangely enough, this did not frighten her as much as one might have supposed. Not that she trusted Trask, or his word, but she had a moment's clear vision which showed her that he had nothing to gain by betraying her at this time. It was the note he had come about. And her husband had embraced this long desired opportunity to bring about the meeting between them. That was all.

But at the mere sight of the man, her very flesh revolted. If all she had fought for so long had been at stake, she could not have spoken a word. She acknowledged his presence with a cold bow.

Fortunately, he was just going. He should have been home before. As a matter of fact, he had been away since the night before. He had only stopped a moment in accordance with his friend's telegraphed request. So that was it. Robert had sent him a telegram. He seemed in



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And then had followed lies, and more lies, and then
more lies



the best of humours, so the matter of the note must have been satisfactorily arranged.

She took the opportunity, however, as Robert was accompanying him to the door to whisper to Doris:

“Doris, dear, was he—Mr. Trask—here long?”

Doris thought that he had been there an awfully long time. They had talked and talked. And Mr. Trask had asked Daddy to go fishing Sunday down at Long Branch.

“Wouldn’t it be funny if Mr. Trask found your purse, Mamma?” she added.

Her husband coming in a moment later, and Doris having been sent off to bed in spite of her protests, Mrs. Strickland found her first opportunity to ask about the note.

For reply, her husband drew it from his pocket. He had carefully torn off his signature from the bottom. But it had been paid, actually paid. The Cleveland people had kept their word nobly. His debt was wiped out. But even while she was listening to his account of his good fortune, and how everything looked positively rose-coloured for the future, she was saying to herself:

"Then he couldn't have ruined him, after all!"

She betrayed the greatest eagerness to get away. When did he think they could start? There was no great hurry. He wasn't going to have her tiring herself out rushing things. Suppose they said two weeks. But she wouldn't need half that time. He reminded her that there would be many little purchases to make. She, for example, would have to have a travelling dress. She would get one ready-made. That reminded him that Doris had said that her mamma had been shopping all the day before, a report that she confirmed.

Just then the bell rang, and Bertha appeared a moment later to say that a Mr. Burke wanted to see Mrs. Strickland.

I told her then of my visit to Burke, and I found that their two accounts agreed down to the smallest particular. She found it hard to say just why the mere sight of Burke's good-natured, kindly face upset her so. Possibly it was because she remembered seeing him at the station at Long Branch and feared that his memory for faces might be as good as hers. As a matter of fact, he had not seen her at all. He is gallant enough

to say that if he *had* seen her he would never have forgotten her in the world.

She saw as soon as she had denied losing a purse that she had made a dreadful mistake. What would have been more simple than to have claimed the purse at once, and watched her opportunity to destroy the incriminating paper? She could easily have put her impromptu trip to the seaside down to a whim that had suddenly seized her. Her husband would never have begrudged her the small amount of money that the outing would have cost. But when she thought of all this, it was too late.

She had had one minute's hope, when Burke in a fit of disgust, had started to go. But the mention of the "Frenchy black purse" by her husband, which was followed up by Burke's producing it, had completely thrown her off her balance once more.

And then had followed lies, and more lies, and then more lies! Each one more inane and foolish than the one that preceded it. She couldn't even begin to remember what she *had* said. She was losing ground each minute, growing more

desperate in consequence. And the cruel part of it all was that the man for whose happiness and peace of mind she was contending was the one who was torturing her.

Forced to admit that she had been at Long Branch in place of having spent her day in shopping as she had said, she at first declared that she had gone down in answer to the appeal of an old school friend, whom she confessed that she hadn't seen in years, who was desperately ill.

When reminded that Burke had just said that he had gone to the address written on a piece of paper he had found in the bag only to find an old caretaker in charge of an empty house, she had had nothing to say. She couldn't even remember the address that her friend had lived at; neither the number nor the street. Another error, as she was to realise in a moment.

For with a sudden flash of memory, her husband had recalled something familiar about 206 Henderson Place, of which Burke had just spoken. How was she to know that when Trask had asked him to join him on his fishing trip he had written down that very address on a card which he had

taken from his case, and that the card was even now in her husband's pocket?

With a quick movement for which she was totally unprepared, he had snatched up the purse from the table where it was lying. She had had no opportunity to possess herself of it since Robert had taken it from her hand to count the money. Emptying it on the table, he had, after a moment's search, found the thing he was seeking, the address of the fictitious friend. And her friend's address and that of Gerald Trask were one and the same—206 Henderson Place, Long Branch.

In her desperation, she thought of a new lie. That it was even more unconvincing than the last, she did not stop to consider. And, all unthinking, she was preparing the worst trap of all for herself, one from which she could not possibly extricate herself.

She confessed that the story of the sick friend was all a stupid subterfuge. Of course that was Mr. Trask's house. Equally, of course, she had gone down there. The idea of doing so had come to her when she first knew of his project to buy a house in Cleveland. He must remember that she

had never in all her life lived in a house. Always it had been a city apartment that she had called home.

What did she know about the arrangement of a well planned house? The thought of trying to arrange one had appalled her. She had conceived the idea of asking Mr. Trask's permission to go down to Long Branch and go over his house. She had heard that the family were still in the city. So she had telephoned to him for the necessary permission. He had given his consent, and she had gone down and been shown over the house by the old caretaker. The whole thing had been a silly impulse; she saw that now. And fearing her husband's displeasure, she had lacked the courage to tell him the truth.

He listened to all this with a coldness that chilled her heart. When she had finished, his face was still stern and hard. But he managed to ask her quite carelessly if she had arranged all these details over the telephone.

Of course she had.

"What did he say?"

"He said that he didn't mind at all."

"And he gave you his address?"

"Yes."

"Over the telephone?"

"Yes."

"That's the last lie you'll tell me!"

He sprang to his feet, his face distorted with passion.

"Robert!" she screamed, "what do you mean?"

"I mean that this address is in Trask's handwriting! Do you think I don't know his reputation where women are concerned?"

With a furious gesture he rushed over to his satchel standing in the corner of the room, and took from it his revolver.

The rest we already know.

CHAPTER XV

MAY'S FLIGHT

IN her mad flight from the house, she had had but one thought. In spite of the ominous sound that had come to her ears over the telephone, there might still be a chance that she would get there in time.

What was she to do? She did not know. But at any and all costs she must prevent her husband from being a murderer. She had no thought of herself. She would admit anything, confess anything, promise anything. She would gladly go away by herself, giving up husband and child, never to set eyes on either again. She would even declare that she had gone to Trask willingly. That she no longer loved her husband. That she had been deceiving him for years. That she had never loved him. Anything! Anything!

She would make herself more despicable than any woman had ever been since the world began. The blacker she made herself out to be, the better.

For surely no man would take the life of another for the sake of a woman as worthless as she would show herself to be.

She had started from the house, running. But she found that she was attracting the attention of a policeman on the corner. He might stop her, question her, detain her. She could not risk that. So she slowed her pace down to a fast walk.

A strand of her hair which was insecurely fastened, fell over her shoulder. She was conscious that her hat had no pins, and that it sat crookedly on her head. Her hands were bare. She had not thought of her gloves. On her fingers were her two rings; her engagement and her wedding ring. She slipped off her wedding ring and wrapped it in the handkerchief that was clutched in one hand. Whatever happened, that she would keep.

She remembered on entering the avenue that she was not sure on which corner the Trask house stood. She looked about for a policeman of whom to make inquiries. But there were none in sight. As she stood hesitating which way to go, she began to cry softly. She was wasting time, she was wasting time! And every moment was

precious. Supposing, after all, she should be too late?

Ah, at last! A policeman came hurrying down the avenue towards her. She ran towards him, and asked to be directed to the house of Mr. Gerald Trask, the banker. The officer gave her a curious look.

"I'm just going there now. There's been some trouble there. It's that house there," he pointed to one a block further down. "The one with the garden."

She reined in the impulse to hurry along with him. He had looked at her so queerly when she asked for the house. But when he was a short distance down the street, she followed swiftly after him.

Already a crowd had gathered in front of the house. There was a policeman at the door. She abandoned her first idea of going boldly up the steps and ringing the bell.

Besides, she now had a new idea. *If* she were too late, if what she had heard in the telephone was what she feared it was, she might still be in time to aid her husband to escape.

The front entrance being out of the question, she walked down the garden side of the house. She could see a room brilliantly lighted in which a number of persons seemed to be moving excitedly about.

Ah! Now, she had it! Why had she not thought of it before! She would find her way into the house—it would be a simple matter from one of those low windows; in the confusion she could slip in without any one paying any attention, without a doubt—and give herself up as the person who had fired the shot. It was most probable that the two men had been alone. There would have been no one to witness their quarrel. And if, as she hoped, her husband had succeeded in making his escape, who would be the wiser? (The chance that Trask might have fired the shot she had heard never entered her head.)

To be sure—and she thought of it with a glowing heart—her husband would be certain to come back and give himself up when he learned what she had done. But, even if he did, her story would be the more plausible of the two. She had been deeply wronged by the banker, and she had

revenged herself. It would be perfectly apparent that he was prompted by his natural chivalry in offering to take the onus of the crime on his own shoulders. And so, she would be able to expiate her fault.

If any one saw her open the little gate—which happened to be unlocked—and go into the garden, they were not sufficiently interested to make any move to prevent her. She remembered the delicate perfume of the jasmine as it came to her on the evening air.

Still unmolested, she reached the French windows which gave her a view of the room. It was a large room, handsomely furnished. She was surprised at the number of people who were there already. There were officers in uniform, and persons who looked as she imagined detectives would look, in plain clothes. They were all whispering together, or talking in low tones. It was impossible to catch what they said.

Presently she noticed a woman in a peignoir, lying back on a couch. Her face was very pale. A maid was bending over her, and a young man was fanning her. Over at the other side of the

room, an elderly man with greying hair was just rising from a stooping posture. One of the men in uniform apparently asked him some question, in reply to which he shook his head. He pointed to something stretched on the floor beside the table, and crossed the room to go over to it.

She craned her neck to see what he had been doing when she first saw him. Another officer came into her range of vision with an unfolded sheet in his hand, which he proceeded to spread over the object that had been absorbing the elderly man's attention when she first saw him. Before he quite covered it, she had time to recognise the feet and legs of Gerald Trask from the pattern of the trousers which he had worn earlier in the evening.

So she *was* too late to carry out her first plan. But the other, the better one, was left.

She took a step nearer which brought her out of the denser shadows. Fortunately no one happened to look in her direction. She was going to step in the window and give herself up. What was the elderly, little man doing now? Again, he was stooping down over something. She was

puzzled to think what it could be. She stepped closer still, in order to see.

God of Heaven! It was her husband lying dead before her! In place of one, she had the blood of *two* men on her hands. Crazed with horror, she turned and fled into the night.

(Mrs. Strickland could never tell just what happened between the time she fled from the Trask house and when she found herself in her bed in the hospital. The hospital records are almost equally barren of any information. All that we will perhaps ever know is that she was brought to the institution by a good-hearted cab-driver who had found her unconscious near the entrance to Central Park.)

CHAPTER XVI

A WIFE'S SACRIFICE

FOR the first time in my life, I was late in arriving at the court room. It was not that we had not started promptly, I will give Mrs. Strickland and the nurse that credit. The fault was really my own. I had quite forgotten, in making my calculations that I must allow for a slight delay in conducting the two women to the waiting-room.

While I was still apprehensive that Mrs. Strickland might prove to be unequal to the ordeal before her, my fears were somewhat allayed at seeing that she, herself, seemed to have perfect confidence in her ability to go through with it. The nurse, too, wore an air of determination that I found positively bracing. Her whole manner indicated that she felt that it was her duty to see that her patient should accomplish what she had set out to, and that she made it a rule to do her duty.

It was just twenty-two minutes after ten

when I finally entered the court-room. I experienced the novel—and I may add distinctly unpleasant—sensation of being rebuked by the Court.

“This court convenes at ten o’clock, Mr. Arbuckle,” said His Honour sharply.

“I must ask Your Honour to excuse me. I have been working all night on this case. There has been an unexpected development over night. Last evening, Mrs. Strickland, the wife of the defendant, came to my house. It seems that she has been dangerously ill, and it is only the realisation of the importance of her testimony that has enabled her to be in condition to take the witness stand. She has told me a story, Your Honour, which puts an entirely different aspect upon this case.”

The District Attorney was on his feet in an instant. Out of the tail of my eye, I saw that he had lost something of his air of overweening confidence. “I object, Your Honour, to counsel commenting upon the testimony of a witness who has not yet been called.”

“Very well, Your Honour. I shall call Mrs.

Strickland at once. Her testimony will require no comment. Call Mrs. Strickland, please."

As the attendant went to the door to call the witness, I bent over Strickland's bowed head.

"It's all right, Strickland. She is coming of her own free will. Nothing could hold her back now. She has been very, very ill. It was only yesterday that she learned of your position. You must be prepared for a great change in her appearance."

She came in slowly, leaning slightly on the arm of the attendant. As she bowed slightly to the Court on taking the witness stand, her eyes fell for the first time on the figure of her husband. Her eyes dilated. A wave of colour swept into her face, leaving it more pale than before by contrast, when it died away. For the first time, all my fears for her vanished. There was that in her glance that told me that her indomitable spirit would see her through.

"Raise your right hand," said the Clerk.

For a moment, she fumbled with the glove which she had forgotten to remove.

"Do you solemnly swear that the testimony

you are about to give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God?"

"I do."

"What is your name?"

"May Deane Strickland."

"Mrs. Strickland," I asked, "are you the wife of Robert Strickland, the defendant?"

"Yes, sir."

"When were you married?"

"July 15th, 1903."

"Did you know Gerald Trask?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"When did you first meet Mr. Trask?"

"In March, 1900."

"That was before you knew Mr. Strickland?"

"Yes, sir; more than two years before."

"How old were you at that time?"

"Just seventeen."

"Where did you first meet Mr. Trask?"

"At Lakewood."

"Now, Mrs. Strickland, describe your relations with Mr. Trask at that time."

"He was very attentive to me, and took me

about a good deal. About ten days after I met him, I returned to the city, and he came back, too. He kept sending me things and taking me out. Then, one day, he asked me to marry him."

"When was that?"

"In April, 1900."

"Did you accept him?"

"Not the first time. I asked him to wait."

"What did he say?"

"He said he would wait as long as I wanted him to. But every time he saw me, he spoke to me about it—telling me how much he loved me and how much I meant to him. He seemed so earnest and sincere that I believed everything he said. At last, I yielded and consented to marry him."

"When was that?"

"On the 19th of May."

"Yes?"

"He said he wanted to be married next day. But he also said that on account of his family, he couldn't let it be known for awhile, so we would have to be married secretly. Next day he called for me in his automobile and said that we

would go to an hotel at Great Neck, Long Island, to meet a clergyman with whom he had made arrangements. We arrived at Great Neck at about seven o'clock that evening."

"Yes?"

Again her face flushed. She waited a moment until she could regain the mastery over herself. I was probably, with one exception, the only person in that crowded room who knew the whole shameful story she was about to tell. That exception was Mrs. Gerald Trask. I looked over at where she was sitting. She was watching Mrs. Strickland intently, but I thought that I detected a growing surprise in her face.

"We had arranged to have breakfast in our rooms the next morning. As I came out of our bedroom, the waiter knocked at the door of the drawing-room. He had come to set the table for breakfast. I told him to leave it for the present. I had secretly determined to do it myself. I would have liked to have prepared the breakfast if it had been possible. In the circumstances, I had to content myself with doing everything that I could to make the table look attractive.

"Mr. Trask had gone out a few minutes before, saying that he would be back immediately. I was just debating whether I would have time to run out into the pretty garden that I could see from my window, and gather a flower or two to give my table a finishing touch, and wondering to whom I should apply for the necessary permission, when Mr. Russell, the proprietor of the hotel, came in, a large bouquet of roses in his hand.

"He was a nice, elderly man about the age of my father. I had taken a liking to him on sight. And, if a little later I thought him unreasonable, harsh, and cruel, it was because I didn't understand.

" 'Good morning, Mrs. Trask,' he said, offering me the flowers, for which I thanked him warmly. 'I've just come in to see that the table is laid properly. I want your first breakfast to be a function.'

" 'Well, I think, myself, that it looks very nice, indeed,' I laughed.

"Fortunately, it seemed to meet with his approval. For, having looked at it critically, he nodded his head.

“ ‘I told the chef to make the effort of his life.’

“ ‘That was darling of you, Mr. Russell.’

“ ‘And,’ he went on, ‘I wish you both lots of happiness. That bridal bouquet, I want you to understand, came from our own garden.’

“ ‘I assured him that they were beautiful, and that I would prize them all the more because they hadn’t come from a florist’s in the ordinary way.

“ ‘With a last hope that we might enjoy our breakfast, he was just going out of the door when Mr. Trask returned. The two men exchanged cordial greetings. I gathered that Mr. Trask had been down often before.

“ ‘I called Mr. Trask’s attention to the flowers and said that I thought that Mr. Russell had been very nice to give them to me. He said that of course no one could help being nice to me, for which pretty speech I rewarded him by giving him a rose for his buttonhole.

“ ‘Every word of our conversation during breakfast is burned into my brain. They told me afterwards, that during my subsequent illness, I kept going over it, and over it, as if I were repeating

something I had deliberately committed to memory.

“ ‘Shall we sit down? The breakfast smells very interesting.’

“ ‘Before you’ve had a mouthful to eat, you must tell me where you’ve been all this long while!’

“ ‘I’ve been fixing the car.’

“ ‘I was just going to look for you. You’ve been gone ages.’

“ ‘Only fifteen minutes.’

“ ‘Only fifteen minutes! Why, that’s a lifetime. I thought you were never coming back.’

“ ‘Did you? And what would you have done, if I hadn’t?’

“ ‘Heavens, what an idea! That *would* have been a nice state of affairs, wouldn’t it? And on our first day!’

“ ‘Yes. Parted at the altar, eh?’

“ ‘I think you deserve a scolding for running away for so long.’

“ ‘Don’t scold me. I do hate being scolded on an empty stomach.’

“ ‘Will you promise never to do it again?’

“ ‘Yes, I promise.’

“ ‘Oh, that isn’t enough. You must say: “I’ll never, never, never leave you again as long as I live.” Say that.’

“ ‘I’ll never, never, never leave you— What is the rest of it?’

“ ‘—Again as long as I live.’

“ ‘Again as long as I live. Have I got it right? Is that all of it?’

“ ‘Yes. And now you must ask me to forgive you.’

“ ‘Forgive me!’

“ ‘May dear.’

“ ‘May dear.’

“ ‘And he leaned across the table to kiss me.

“ ‘Ooh!’ I said. ‘You taste of gasoline.’

“ ‘Yes; I’ve been tanking up the car.’

“ ‘Why?’

“ ‘We’re going away this afternoon.’

“ ‘Going away? Where to?’

“ ‘Anywhere you like. Oh, there’s no fun here. This place is dead.’

“ ‘But I love this place,’ I persisted. ‘It will



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“And he leaned across the table to kiss me”

always be sacred to me. Our wedding place! It's the greatest happiness we'll ever know.'

"I was sincere in what I said. I genuinely thought that I was in love with Gerald Trask. It was only later, when I came to know what real *love* was—the love that I have for my husband, Robert Strickland—that I realised that in my youth and inexperience I had taken the counterfeit for the real, the shadow for the substance. I was flattered and dazzled by his protestations of love for me. I believed him when he told me that his life would be empty without me. There was intoxication in the thought that I loomed so large in the life of a man who had seen the world and society and had had the opportunity of meeting so many pretty and clever women. I know now that his appeal was to my vanity and not to my heart. But you must remember that I was more ignorant of the world than most girls of my age. And I was only seventeen, little more than a child.

"'Of course, there's a lot in that,' he went on in reply to my protest. 'Still, it's not very lively.'

"'Every once in a while, Gerald, years from now, we'll slip down here quite quietly—just you

and I alone—and live this day over again, won't we?"

" 'Yes; that will be bully.'

" 'Isn't it strange! Yesterday, Great Neck was only a queer name to me. And now it's the dearest spot on earth. I'm so happy, Gerald, dear. Must we keep it quiet for long?"

" 'For quite a while yet, I'm afraid.'

" 'It seems so wrong for families to interfere in things like this,' I objected. 'If people love each other, I don't see why they have to consult any one else about it.'

" 'Of course, you are perfectly right about that, but you can't get everybody to look at it just that way.'

" 'I wish we *could* tell. I'm just longing to go about telling everybody how happy I am.'

" 'But you mustn't say a word to any one. Remember, you've promised.'

" 'No, I won't. I'll keep my promise. But the clergyman may tell some one, Gerald. Clergymen are very gossipy, you know. At least all the ones I have ever known were!'

" 'I'll see that he doesn't tell, I promise you.'

“ ‘What’s his name?’

“ ‘The clergyman?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘Oh—Smith. Walter Smith.’

“ ‘Is he nice?’

“ ‘Yes; fine chap.’

“ ‘You’re very good friends, aren’t you?’

“ ‘Oh, yes. We were classmates at college.’

“ ‘I’m glad of that.’

“ ‘Why?’

“ ‘Because it will be much nicer than having a perfect stranger. Don’t you think so?’

“ ‘Of course. That’s why I picked him out.’

“ ‘Do you think he’ll be here soon?’

“ ‘Sometime during the morning.’

“ ‘It’s strange he didn’t receive your first message last night, isn’t it?’

“ ‘There’s nothing so strange about it after all. His servant forgot to deliver it, that’s all.’

“ ‘And, of course, it was too late for him to come down after you telephoned from here.’

“ ‘Yes, of course. It was almost midnight. I couldn’t well have asked it of him.’

“ ‘I wish he had come last night.’

“ ‘Yes; it’s too bad he didn’t.’

“ ‘I feel so uncomfortable about it.’

“ ‘I don’t see why. A few hours sooner or later—what possible difference does it make?’

“ ‘I suppose it doesn’t really make any difference. I wish, just the same, that you had gotten some one in the neighbourhood.’

“ ‘I told you I tried to,’ he said with a touch of impatience. ‘The only clergyman who could have married us is out of town attending a convention. But if I had dreamed that you were going to feel so cut up about it—’

“ ‘You aren’t angry with me, are you, dear?’

“ ‘No, certainly not. I understand just how you feel about it. But it’s only a matter of form, after all, you know.’

“ ‘Of course it is. And I’m a silly girl, and you’re very patient with me. Do you know, Gerald, I’m almost afraid of you sometimes?’

“ ‘What nonsense! Why?’

“ ‘You know so many things.’

“ ‘That’s no reason why you should be afraid of me.’

“‘I know it isn’t. Gerald dear, you’re *sure* you never cared for any other girl?’

“‘My dear child,’ he laughed. ‘I’ve told you so a hundred times! Don’t you believe me?’

“‘Y-e-s, but it seems so wonderful that you should fall in love with me. You’ve met so many other girls.’

“‘So I have. But I’ve never met any one like you.’

“‘You *do* care a great deal for me, don’t you?’

“‘I’ve told you.’

“‘And you’ll be very good to me?’

“‘As good as I know how to be.’

“‘And you’ll always love me?’

“‘As long as I live. Haven’t I said so?’

“‘I do wish Mr. Smith would come.’

“‘I can’t imagine what’s keeping him.’

“‘Don’t you think that you had better telephone again?’

“‘I’d rather not. Let’s be patient a little longer.’

“‘What will we do if he doesn’t come?’

“‘Well, you see we must leave here this afternoon.’

“ ‘But we can’t leave without being married!’

“ ‘Why not?’

“ ‘Why not! Gerald, you’re laughing at me! Surely, surely you wouldn’t want to.’

“ ‘I thought we had agreed about that.’

“ ‘I know, but—’

“ ‘I don’t see what you are worried about. It’s only a matter of a ceremony—a formality.’

“ ‘I know; but a girl looks at these things differently.’

“ ‘Well, if my man doesn’t come, it would be impossible to be married here anyhow.’

“ ‘Couldn’t you find *some* one?’

“ ‘Impossible! There’s no one available. Besides, we couldn’t get a ring down here.’

“ ‘Haven’t you brought a ring?’

“ ‘No, I forgot all about it. It’s all right, though. I told Wallace to bring one down with him.’

“ ‘Wallace? I thought you said his name was Walter.’

“ ‘So it is. Wallace is a nick-name I gave him long ago, because he’s so proud of his Scottish ancestry.’

“ ‘But I’ve got a gold ring that will do,’ I said. And I went into the bedroom to get it out of the little box of trinkets that I had, for some reason or other, placed in my satchel at the last moment.”

For the first time her voice, which, although it had been very low was clear and distinct, broke. Had she reached the limit of her strength? Was she going to fail me now? The silence in the court room was absolute. Even the women had forgotten to fan themselves. Strickland caught me by the arm.

“For God’s sake, do not go on with it!” he whispered hoarsely. “Do you want her to kill herself? Can’t you see that she is at the end of her strength?”

“There’s only a little more,” I said soothingly. “She has passed the worst. The strain is nearly over.” But I was far from feeling the confidence that I pretended to. Mrs. Strickland was leaning back in her chair. Her eyelids drooped over her feverish eyes. I feared that she was about to faint.

Then I suddenly remembered the nurse, waiting in the outer room. Stepping over to His Hon-

our's desk I asked for a moment's delay, while I went to see if I could get something to revive the half-fainting woman. Having obtained the necessary permission, I went in search of the nurse. I never doubted that a person as capable as she gave me the impression of being would have had the forethought to provide herself with some remedy against just such a situation.

As I passed along the room, I noted the tense expression on the faces of the crowd that filled it. Chancing to glance at Mrs. Trask, I was astonished to see that even she had been moved out of her habitual calm by the witness's story. There was no doubt about it, she had been crying. Her eyes were still red. At that moment, I felt more kindly towards her than I would have thought possible earlier in the day. I realised that she, too, must have suffered as the wife of Gerald Trask. Her quick jealousy which seemed ready to flame into life at the bare mention of a woman's name, was not without reason for its existence.

I was not disappointed in my estimate of Miss Foley's capabilities. Have I said that the nurse's name was Foley? Hardly waiting for me to ex-

plain the nature of my errand, she quickly poured a few drops of a dark and pungent liquid into a glass, added some water from the water-cooler that stood in the corner of the room, and handed it to me without as much as a word.

Hastening back into the court room, I went over to Mrs. Strickland's side. I had only to touch her lightly on the arm to arouse her. Opening her eyes, she saw the glass in my hand. Taking it from me, she drained it at a draught. The effect was immediate. It must have been an unusually powerful tonic, and no doubt the few minutes respite from the terrific strain to which she was being subjected contributed to her recovery.

"You are very good," she whispered. "I am all right now. I am sorry to have caused you so much trouble. But for the moment, I couldn't go on."

"You are sure that you are strong enough to go on? I am sure that His Honour will grant us a few moments' recess to give you time to recover yourself completely."

"No, no; let me finish while I am here. I

could never find the courage to go through with it again."

Having made a sign to the Court that my witness was ready, I left her side and went back to my place.

"You may proceed, Mr. Arbuckle."

CHAPTER XVII

SHIPWRECK

“WHAT occurred while you were in the next room, Mrs. Strickland?”

“While I was looking for the ring,” resumed the witness in a weak voice, which, however, gathered strength as she went on, “I heard some one knocking at the door of the sitting-room, and I heard Mr. Trask call: ‘Come in.’ For the moment I hoped that it might be the Reverend Mr. Smith, who had been so unaccountably delayed.

“Hurriedly snatching up my ring, I ran back into the sitting-room. But it was only the proprietor, Mr. Russell. In his hand he held an opened telegram. I had time to notice that all the friendly, genial expression that his kindly old face had worn earlier in the day, had vanished. His whole manner was stern and forbidding.

“‘Hello, Russell,’ said Mr. Trask, ‘what have you got there? Despatches from the front?’

“ ‘Gerald, look; will this do?’ I asked, holding out my ring.

“ ‘But Mr. Russell went on without even acknowledging my presence. ‘I’d like an explanation of this!’ He shook the telegram angrily in front of Mr. Trask’s face.

“ ‘I can’t very well explain it without knowing what it’s all about,’ replied Mr. Trask. But I could see that he was very uneasy about something.

“ ‘Detain May Deane until I arrive. She is with Gerald Trask. Henry Deane,’ read Mr. Russell.

“ ‘From my father!’ I cried.

“ ‘Mr. Trask sprang to his feet. I could see that he was terribly angry. He didn’t even look at Mr. Russell, much less attempt to answer him. ‘What is this?’ he demanded of me.

“ ‘I don’t know, Gerald. I don’t understand it,’ I said. I was beginning to be frightened without exactly knowing why.

“ ‘Didn’t you give me your solemn promise—’

“ ‘I have told no one,’ I protested.

“ ‘Well, Mr. Trask?’ demanded Mr. Russell.

“ ‘Well, what?’

“ ‘Is this young lady your wife, or isn’t she?’

“ ‘What difference does that make to you?’

“ ‘It makes a great deal of difference to me. You’ve registered as man and wife.’

“ ‘I don’t see what you’re worrying about, then,’ said Mr. Trask, attempting to turn it off with a laugh.

“ ‘I couldn’t understand why he acted so. Why didn’t he explain the whole thing at once. Even then, I felt that I should die of shame!’

“ ‘But explain to Mr. Russell, Gerald! We’re going to be married this morning, Mr. Russell,’ I said, turning to him. ‘We *were* going to be married last night, only there was no clergyman.’

“ ‘Keep quiet, May!’

“ ‘For the first time Mr. Russell seemed to be aware of my presence. He turned to me, but his face wore a look that was almost sneering. ‘Quite so!’ he said with a hard, little laugh. ‘There probably aren’t more than about a dozen clergymen within a mile of this hotel!’

“ ‘I stared at him in blank amazement. And then I felt myself grow cold all over. My heart

was beating as though it were going to burst. 'What do you mean? Gerald!' I screamed.

" 'Keep quiet, I tell you,' he snarled. 'Let me manage this. What do you want, Russell?'

" 'I want you to get out of this house at once.'

" 'We are planning to leave this afternoon.'

" 'This afternoon won't do. You must go immediately. It's eleven o'clock now. You must be out by noon.'

" 'I'll go when I get good and damned ready,' blustered Mr. Trask.

" 'No, you won't. You'll go now. I won't have any'—he hesitated for a minute—'any *questionable characters* in my house.'

"At these dreadful words, I thought that I was going to faint. I fell into a chair beside the table. And it was only a few short minutes since I had been happily sitting there, in that very chair, eating my first breakfast with the man who, in the sight of God, at least, was my husband!

" 'Gerald! Gerald! Don't let him say such dreadful things!'

" 'Will you be quiet?'

" 'I've been years building up a reputation for

this place,' went on Mr. Russell, 'and I don't intend risking it for you, or for any one else.'

" 'You're damned independent, old man. This isn't the only roadhouse on Long Island, you know,' said Mr. Trask coarsely.

" 'I guess I can stand the loss of your trade, and of anybody like you. I never did care for your sort, anyhow.'

" 'You've said enough, Russell. You'd better clear out of here.'

" 'All right. But I want you out of here by noon, understand that. Young lady,' he said, turning to me—and for the first time his face softened, and I could see a look of pity in his old eyes—'I hope for your sake that your father gets here before then.'

" 'For some reason, these words seemed to put Mr. Trask in a rage. 'If you don't get out of this room, I'll kick you out!' He shook his clenched fist in Mr. Russell's face.

" 'I'm going. I've said all I've got to say for now. But, remember! If you're not out of here by noon, I'll send for the police.' With that, he left us.

"At that I broke down and cried from sheer nervousness and fright. 'Gerald, why did he talk like that? Why didn't you explain?'

"But he paid no attention to me. He was striding up and down the little room. I could see that he was terribly upset. But even then, I knew it was not of me that he was thinking.

" 'This is a nice mess we're in!'

" 'But, Gerald, if you had only explained about Mr. Smith!'

"He made an angry gesture. 'Didn't I tell you not to let your father know where we were?'

" 'But I didn't!'

" 'What!'

" 'I didn't, I tell you. Of course I would have, if you hadn't told me not to.'

"He came over and shook me violently by the shoulders. 'Don't lie to me!'

" 'Gerald!' I broke down utterly at that.

" 'I told you fifty times, if I told you once, that I didn't want anybody to know.'

" 'But I didn't, I didn't,' I sobbed.

"For a moment he seemed almost ashamed of

himself for having laid his hands upon me. 'But how else *could* he have found out?' he asked.

" 'I don't know. But not from me.'

"He began to pace up and down the room once more. 'Just what I was trying my best to avoid has happened.'

" 'But it's not my fault.'

" 'He'll come down here and make a scene.'

" 'Not when he finds that it's really all right,' I said eagerly. 'But I wonder how he knew that we weren't married yet?'

"Mr. Trask suddenly stood still. Pulling out his watch, he frowned over it for a second. Then he seemed to have made up his mind to something.

" 'Don't waste time now. Get ready.'

" 'Ready for what?'

" 'To go; what did you suppose I meant! We've got to clear out of here before the old man gets here.'

"I stared at him in amazement. Go before my father came! What could he be thinking of? I jumped out of my chair and ran over and seized him by the arm.

“ ‘Oh, no, Gerald, we must wait now. Don’t you see—’

“ ‘I’m managing this. Get ready, I tell you.’

“ ‘There came a pounding at the door. Not a knocking, but a pounding.

“ ‘Oh, that must be Mr. Smith,’ I said faintly. But I knew in my heart that it was not.

“ ‘Damn it! That’s your father, I’ll bet. Now we’re both in for the devil of a row.’

“ ‘There came a rattling at the knob of the door. It evidently was locked. Mr. Trask must have locked it after Mr. Russell without my having seen him.

“ ‘Shall I open the door?’ I whispered.

“ ‘Wait a minute,’ he whispered back. ‘If it’s your father, I don’t want to see him.’

“ ‘But, Gerald—’ The pounding and rattling began again.

“ ‘Listen to me.’ He seemed suddenly to have made up his mind to something. ‘I’m going into the other room. I’ll wait in there while you talk to the old man. If he asks for me, tell him I’m out. Get rid of him as quickly as you can. Do you understand?’

“ ‘Yes; but if it’s Mr. Smith, after all?’

“ ‘Do as I tell you, do you hear me?’

“He ran into the bedroom and closed the door after him. I heard him swear as he tried to lock it. But the key wouldn’t turn. I waited a minute, and then I went over to the door of the sitting-room and unlocking it, threw it open.

“ ‘Father!’ I cried.

“His face was whiter than I had ever seen it. He seemed to have grown older in a day. There were deep lines that I had never noticed in his dear face!”

For a moment, the witness’s iron control threatened to give way. But with a supreme effort, she managed to go on. I thanked God that it was nearly over.

“He gave me no word of greeting. ‘Where’s Trask?’ was all he said.

“ ‘Why did you come here, Father?’ I asked in wonder.

“ ‘Where’s Trask?’ he repeated.

“ ‘He—he’s out.’

“ ‘Where did he go?’

“ ‘Why—I don’t know—he didn’t say. But, Father—’

“ ‘When is he coming back?’

“ ‘His manner frightened me almost as much as Mr. Trask’s had done.

“ ‘Why—not for quite a while,’ I said lamely. And then I asked again: ‘How did you know we were down here, Father?’

“ ‘Never mind now. Get your things, May.’

“ ‘My things? Why?’

“ ‘We’re going home.’

“ ‘No, no! I can’t do that.’ And then I knew that he had found out that we had not been married yet. I did not ask myself how, I only felt that I must explain everything without a minute’s delay. Now I understood why he looked so stern and troubled.

“ ‘But, Father, Gerald and I are going to be married this morning.’

“ ‘Get your things, May.’

“ ‘He had never spoken so coldly to me in his life. I was the youngest, and no doubt for that reason, he had always been more indulgent with me than with my sisters.

“ ‘But, Father, you don’t seem to understand. Gerald and I are going to be married. We’re waiting for the clergyman. We’ve been waiting ever since last night.’

“Two big tears brimmed over from my father’s eyes. Twice he tried to speak and failed.

“ ‘He can’t marry you,’ he finally managed. His voice was husky.

“ ‘He can’t marry me! He can’t—What do you mean!’

“ ‘He is already married.’

“ ‘Married,’ I said dully. I understood the word. I understood what the word married meant. But, somehow, I didn’t understand it connected with Gerald. I stood what seemed to be a long time with my hand on my father’s shoulder looking up into his face. The tears were coming quite fast now. I started to count them. There were two, and then two more, and then two more, and then—

“ ‘What was that he was saying? He was apparently speaking to me, so I stopped counting the tears to listen.

“ ‘His wife telephoned to me this morning. She’s been having him watched.’

“ ‘There were two more, and two more, and two—

“ ‘And then the meaning of those dreadful words crashed into my brain!

“ ‘I don’t believe it! I don’t believe it!’ I screamed.

“ ‘Come, May.’

“ ‘I stopped sobbing. For Gerald’s sake, I *must* clear up this fearful misunderstanding.

“ ‘But, Father, don’t you understand?’ I tried to keep control of my voice, but I had to stop every now and then, because my sobs threatened to choke me. ‘We are to be married—to be married this morning. There’s—there’s a clergyman coming down. He was to have come last—last night. Say that you understand!’

“ ‘My father said nothing. He didn’t even look at me. He seemed to be looking at some one over my shoulder. Some one who was standing behind me. Of course, I knew that there was no one there. But my father seemed to think that there was. He must have grieved terribly

over what some one had told him about us. He didn't look as if he had had any sleep for ever so long. That was it. I had heard somewhere that people who had been without sleep for a long time were sometimes almost delirious. My father fancied that we were not alone.

“ ‘Father! What makes you act so strangely?’

“Then I couldn't stand his looking over my shoulder any longer. I turned round. There was a woman standing there behind me. A woman whom I had never seen before in my life. She wasn't looking at me. She was looking at my father.

“ ‘Who are you? What do you want?’

“But she didn't answer me.

“I turned back to father. ‘Who is she?’

“ ‘This is Mrs. Gerald Trask.’

“Then in a sort of dream I heard the woman say: ‘You had better go home with your father.’

“I rushed over to the door of the bedroom.

“ ‘Gerald! Gerald!’ I cried, pounding on the door. There was no answer. I flung the door wide. The room was empty. I ran to the window, which was a low one, giving onto the garden.

The road by which we had come made a sharp turn just in front of the window. While I stood staring out, I heard the 'honk' of an auto-horn. A car, going at a terrific speed, shot past and just barely made the corner. The driver was muffled up in a long dust coat, the collar turned up about his ears. But I knew that car, and I knew the driver. It was Gerald Trask!

"I don't exactly know what happened next. I believe that I fainted. And afterwards for many, many weeks I was terribly ill. For a long time they thought that, even if my life were spared, I would never again have my reason.

"I was taken to a place in the country where I could have perfect quiet, and where there would be nothing to bring to my mind my experience. My sister took care of me, and I was among people whom my father had known as a young man, and who were devoted to him, and because of him, to me. Indeed I had occasion to test their devotion once since, when I was very ill before my child was born.

"For weeks, the sound of that automobile horn



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“I heard the woman say: ‘You had better go home with your father.’”

went through my head. My sister has told me that for days my ravings took the form of repeating the conversations I had had with Mr. Trask, with Mr. Russell, and with my father on that awful day. Before I had fully recovered, my father died.

"Then I met Robert, my husband. When I saw that he loved me, I tried to tell him about—about that terrible experience. But I was afraid of destroying his happiness. He would not have understood. Men don't understand. And I loved him so!

"He seemed to need me and to need his belief *in* me. I came to realise that I must never tell him. He was all that life meant to me. I wanted to devote my every thought to shielding him from the slightest unhappiness. Even though he was a strong man, he seemed to need my protection.

"Two years later, we were married. I had already begun to think of that awful experience only as a terrible dream. Then my baby, Doris, came. And then I had two to watch over. The

happiness of those two was my one aim in life. For nine years, we three were perfectly happy together.

“Then one day—about a year ago—my husband mentioned *his* name. He had met that man somewhere. I hoped and prayed that their acquaintance was to be only a passing one. But my prayer was not answered. They became more and more friendly. Robert spoke more than once of having us meet, but for a whole year I managed to contrive to avoid that meeting.

“Meanwhile, Robert’s business troubles had begun. He—that man—lent him money and helped him in other ways. In their growing friendship, I saw the wreck of all our happiness.

“Then a business opportunity arose, which would take us away from New York. I urged my husband to accept this, and he finally decided to do so. It seemed as if, after all, my prayer was being answered in a different way. Some Power was guarding the happiness of my husband and my baby.

“It was on a Monday that Robert left to go for a few days to Cleveland, Ohio. He had already

made several visits there in connection with his new business. But it was chiefly on our account that he was returning this time. A house that he had seen and liked, and which could be had at a figure which he felt that he could afford, had been tentatively offered to him. Now, it seemed, that the owner had suddenly decided that he wished to close the deal without loss of time. It was that, that took him back on a hurried trip.

"I knew that he had given *him* his note for ten thousand dollars, and that the note would fall due before his return. I reminded him of this. But he said that it could easily be arranged. He would write a note to—to Mr. Trask, explaining that he would return by the 24th—the note was due on the 22nd—and that he was too good a fellow to make any trouble about it. Then, too, he was expecting an advance from his new business associates in Cleveland which would make the paying of it all the easier.

"Tuesday night, the next night after my husband had gone, *he* came. He had received my husband's note, and came to leave word that it was all right, he said. He knew, of course, that

my husband was married, but he had no idea that I was his wife.

“He recognised me the moment I came into the room. My maid had merely said that it was some one with a message for Mr. Strickland, and I had thought that it might be some one to arrange about the moving of our household goods, as my husband was hesitating between two bids that he had received. He had written leaving the matter open until his return, but I thought that perhaps one of the firms had wished to leave some word for him.

“He threatened to tell Robert everything. He taunted me with the fact of my long silence. He said that my husband would believe anything he chose to tell him on account of that.

“He demanded that I come down to his house at Long Branch the next day. I begged for mercy. I went down on my knees to him. I begged, and begged, and begged! He wouldn't even listen to me.

“Then I thought of my sister, who had been with me through all my trouble. *She* would back me up in the confession I now saw that I should

have to make to my husband at last. But even while I defied him, telling him that I could produce a witness who knew of the whole dreadful story at the time, I knew that I was completely at his mercy. And he knew it, as well as I did.

“He said he would ruin Robert, make a pauper of him—of my husband. I knew that the ten thousand dollars was due. Supposing that anything happened that Robert could not pay!

“I was beside myself with fear. I didn’t care for myself. It wasn’t that. I only thought of my husband and my baby. Their happiness was in my hands. I was ready to pay any price to shield them. If by dying, I could have saved them, how willingly, how gladly I would have died! It would have been far easier than—than what he demanded. No, there was only one way, and I *had* to save them!

“But Robert, my husband, found out, and all my years of planning, all the hopes I had in this world, were shattered.

“Yesterday, as I lay half conscious in the hospital, I happened to hear two of the nurses discussing the testimony given in a murder trial by

a little girl. After listening for a time, I discovered that it was *my* little girl they were speaking of. And that it was *my* husband who was on trial for murder, and accused of burglary as well.

"They didn't want to let me come here to-day. But I showed them that I must. I made them see that my husband might be put to death unless the truth were told.

"I've told you the truth. Can't you understand? My husband didn't go to that man's house to rob it. He didn't go there for that wretched money. Robert's not a thief! *I* am the one who is to blame. The fault is all mine. *I* am the guilty one. I've ruined the lives of my husband and baby. God forgive me! God forgive me!"

To my dying day, I shall hear the hopeless anguish of that cry! If there was a dry eye in the court room, I don't know whose it was. It certainly wasn't mine.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE JURY DEBATES

THE jury had been out over four hours. As is always the case, all sorts of rumours were flying about the court. In the corridors and lobbies of the big building little knots of men, and a few women, stood discussing the chances of the jury staying out all night.

The more fashionable part of the crowd who had distinguished our case with their interest had of course dispersed. A few might have been found in some of the higher class restaurants in the neighbourhood. But the majority had gone about their various occupations. Popular interest had, of course, centred itself on Mrs. Strickland. For the moment, the poor lady was probably the most widely talked of woman in New York. After her testimony, even the verdict of the jury was a matter of minor interest—except, naturally, to those who might be said to have a stake in the result.

McLean, whom I encountered just outside of the building, informed me that the general opinion inclined in favour of a "Hung" jury. The theory upon which this prognostication was based seemed to be that while people were inclined to accept the motive supplied by Mrs. Strickland's remarkable story as the one which had actuated the accused man in the shooting of Trask, the fact remained that the disappearance of the ten thousand dollars had not been explained in any satisfactory way.

"I should be inclined to go even further than that," I said sarcastically. "I should say that it had not been explained at all! I'm sure I haven't made any attempt to explain it."

"So they all say," remarked McLean dryly, to which observation I had no reply. All the same, I considered it distinctly unfair—coming from McLean.

A few minutes later I regretted that I had not thought to taunt him with the fact that there seemed to be nothing to bear out *his* cherished theory that it was Mrs. Trask, no less, who could account for the missing cash!

As soon as Mrs. Strickland had left the stand, she had gone, accompanied by Miss Foley to my office, where Mrs. Stanwood and Doris were already waiting.

I had purposely absented myself until the sisters, the one barrier which had existed between them, now happily swept away, would have had time to indulge themselves to the full in what I believe is known to the sex as "a good cry," before intruding upon their lachrymose orgy.

I found that I had timed my arrival with commendable circumspection. There were abundant traces that tears had been shed—even Miss Foley's eyes wore a suspicious redness—but to all appearances, the worst was over.

Doris, a picture of happy contentment, was seated in her mother's lap, her head resting on her shoulder. She gave me her engaging little smile, and held out her small hand, in token that she had forgiven me the unhappy hours I had been compelled to cause her.

Having assured them that, in a jury case, perhaps beyond all others, no news was good news, I left them to enjoy their happy reunion, and has-

tened back to the court. Here I found that the tide of opinion in favour of a disagreement had risen rather than abated. There were many who professed to have inside information that the result of the last several ballots had remained unchanged. Of course the boast of "inside information" was all nonsense. Still I must admit that, after a tolerably long career, the source of these mysterious guesses, which are frequently correct, has never been cleared up to my satisfaction.

It was not until long after the interest in the Strickland trial had died away and the case itself become part of history, that I learned something of the conditions that obtained in the jury-room. If they have any place in this account, the place is here.

At the end of seven ballots, the verdict still stood eleven for acquittal to one for conviction. The "one" was the foreman, a certain Mr. Trumbull, a solid, hard-headed business man, once convinced, almost impossible to move.

For more than an hour, the other eleven had devoted their energies without any marked result,

to trying to convince Trumbull that he was in the wrong. He had been perfectly unmoved by appeals to his reason, to his common sense, and even had submitted to being called "Pig-headed" with entire composure. Finally, he had declared himself as perfectly willing to listen to reason for the seventh time.

"Now, look here, Trumbull," began the gentleman selected (perhaps only by himself) to represent Reason, "what's the good of sending Strickland to the chair? You don't bring Trask back to life by doing it, do you? All you do is kill off a good, clean, straightforward chap who's a valuable asset to the community. And who, after all is said and done, suffers most? Not Strickland! His wife and his little girl—a most remarkable child!—they're the real sufferers. You throw a sensitive woman out on the world and give a little baby a blot on her name that she'll never be able to wipe out. What's your idea? Why do you want to convict him?"

(It is, of course, understood that I do not pretend that these were Reason's exact words. But

this was the gist of the matter, as reported to me. Naturally the same remark applies to everything else that was said.)

"I don't *want* to convict him. I don't want to be instrumental in sending any man to his death. I guess I've got as much humanity in my composition as the rest of you," retorted Mr. Trumbull, rather testily. "To hear you go on, a person would think that I was fairly thirsting for Strickland's blood!"

"Well, then, why are you holding out? Why don't you vote for acquittal?"

"Gentlemen," said the Foreman with dignity, "it seems to me there's one thing you all overlook. We're citizens as well as men. We've sworn to do our duty as jurors, and to render a fair verdict. We mustn't be swayed by personal sentiments. We must govern ourselves entirely by the evidence and by that alone. That's what we're here for—to render justice."

"But rendering justice means something more than applying hard and fast rules of law," went on Reason's spokesman. "I'll grant you that the *letter* of the law declares that if one man kills an-

other, the penalty must be death. But we've got to get beneath the letter. We must get at the spirit. We're not just machines, you know. There's more to this case than a mere mechanical application of the law. We've got to attack this from the *human* standpoint. We must try to put ourselves in Strickland's place. Just consider that for a moment. Suppose that Mrs. Strickland had been your wife, and Trask had been the—the other party. What would *you* have done?"

"Shooting was far too good for Trask," chimed in one of the other jurors.

"We mustn't forget the 'unwritten law,' " suggested another.

"I don't agree with you there," interrupted the spokesman of the occasion. "I don't hold for the 'unwritten law,' as it is called, myself. Ordinarily, I don't believe that there's any justification for taking a human life. But this case which we are considering now, is one in a thousand. This man Trask deliberately invaded his friend's home. He wrecked it. The woman was helpless in his hands. She had lived in terror of him for years.

He knew that. He played on her helplessness. That's why I am for acquittal. And that's just why you should be for acquittal, too. Trumbull, you have a wife. Now just consider—"

"Hold on a moment," said another juror, interrupting. "I think that you are going off at a tangent. Unless I'm entirely mistaken, Trumbull agrees with us that Strickland had ample justification for killing Trask."

"Then why's he holding out?"

"What's keeping him back?"

"Wait a minute; let's hear from Trumbull himself on this point."

"Mr. Moore is right," said Trumbull slowly. "I *do* think that Strickland had cause for killing Trask. If I had been placed in similar circumstances—God help me!—I probably would have done the same thing."

"And still you vote for conviction."

"I vote for conviction, gentlemen, for the reason that I'm not perfectly satisfied that Strickland went to Trask's house to avenge his wife's honour. I am inclined to think that he went there with an entirely different purpose; namely, to rob the safe,

and repossess himself of that ten thousand dollars which he admitted had been 'so darned hard to get.' ”

“You can't really believe that, Trumbull. One look at Strickland's face should be enough to convince you that he's not a thief, a safe-cracker. Of course, I don't know him personally. But I've known him by reputation for a dozen or more years. Ask any one in the business world what his reputation has always been. They'll tell you he's as straight as a die.”

“I grant you all that, gentlemen. But you can't dodge the facts. There's a chain of circumstances woven around Strickland that, to my mind, would go far to damn the Angel Gabriel. Just consider the facts with me for an instant. Strickland was hard pressed. Trask held his note for ten thousand dollars. Apparently his only hope of paying the note was to get an advance, or a loan—whatever you choose to call it—from parties in Cleveland with whom he had about concluded a business deal. He goes away, knowing that he will be absent the day the note falls due. That in itself goes to show that he hadn't much

chance of paying the note if the deal with the Cleveland parties fell through. He comes back two days late with the cash in his pocket, ready to take up the note.

“I won’t go as far as to say that he timed it so, but the fact remains that he didn’t reach home until after banking hours. Why didn’t he wait until morning and go and pay the note at the bank, which would have been the usual thing to do in the circumstances? Add to that the fact that he paid Trask the ten thousand dollars in cash. Why did he pay it in cash? Did any one of you familiar with his long business career ever hear of his having done such a thing before? Of course you didn’t. Nor did anybody else. Why? Because he never did such a thing before in his life. It isn’t a business man’s way of conducting his business.

“The presumption is that he knew that Trask had a safe in his house. There doesn’t seem to have been any secret about it. And Strickland was the only person beside Trask who knew the combination of that safe. And he was unquestionably on the spot when the safe was opened.

Add it all up, and it looks pretty bad. Don't you think so?"

"Of course it looks bad, but it's all been explained."

"It has, has it? Well, all I can say is that the explanation hasn't reached me. If that is so, there are two little points I'd like to have you explain to me. First, how did the burglar open the safe?"

"Tampered with it, of course."

"No, he didn't. Two different police officers testified that the tumblers were in perfect order. No, gentlemen, the safe was opened with the combination. And the only source from which he could have learned the combination was Strickland.

"And that's not all, gentlemen. Remember, I said there were *two* points I'd like to have explained. And they'll have to be explained to my satisfaction before I cast my vote for acquittal."

"Well, what's the other one? Let's have it."

"Strickland had that combination on a card. The card was the only real piece of incriminating evidence against him in connection with the rob-

bery. If he's innocent of the burglary, as you say he is, why did he attempt to destroy that card?"

"How do you know he did?"

"I don't seem to remember anything about that."

"Glover said so."

"That's right. I remember that."

"Moreover, gentlemen, here's the card." The foreman got up and went over to the table, and picked it up. "Look at it. Don't you see that it's torn almost in two? And Glover testified that it was Strickland that tore it."

"There's only one reason why Strickland should have attempted to destroy this card. And that was to wipe out the evidence that would be bound to convict him."

Here the discussion became general. Several of the jurors professed to be hazy, to say the least, about the matter. Some remembered it quite distinctly. Others declared that they had not heard it at all.

Some proposed to send for Glover and ask him to repeat his testimony.

“We can’t do that,” the foreman reminded him. “We’ll have to get permission to have his testimony read to us. If you like, I’ll send in a note to the judge. Ring for an attendant, one of you.”

CHAPTER XIX

MR. GLOVER OBLIGES

As it happened, I was in the court room chatting with Dr. Morgan when I heard the whirr of the electric bell that calls the attendants. The District Attorney was standing across the room with one of the court stenographers.

"There's something doing, evidently," he called.

"An agreement, do you think?" asked Dr. Morgan pleasantly.

"Most likely," replied Mr. Gray, with a side-long look at me.

"How long have they been out?" asked Dr. Morgan.

"Almost five hours," said I, smiling. But the smile was for Mr. Gray.

"Well, what do you think?"

Mr. Gray answered for me.

"I don't know *what* to think,"—I will say he

made the confession handsomely. "This is a most unusual case."

And in saying that, he was not understating the fact.

An attendant came out of the jury room bearing a note, and hurried over to the judge's room.

I went out into the lobby in search of McLean. Fortunately, he was not far off. "Go and bring the ladies," I said in a low tone. It wasn't at all necessary, in my opinion, to inform all the loungers that I suspected that something was about to happen. Let them find it out for themselves, the same way they found out so much that never really took place!

It was about five minutes later that an attendant announced that the judge was coming. Every one who had any official connection with the case hurried to his place. As counsel, I was duly notified to see that the prisoner was brought in.

"All right, gentlemen," came the voice of the attendant, as the jurors filed in and took their places.

"Justice of the Court," announced the clerk. And His Honour took his seat.

At that moment Strickland, followed a moment later by his wife and child, and his sister-in-law, took his place at the table. I signed to McLean and Miss Foley to find seats not far away. I had an idea that the latter's services might be required, no matter what the verdict might be. Still, there was no gainsaying that Mrs. Strickland had been little short of marvellous.

The change in Strickland, himself, was noteworthy. One would hardly have taken him for the same man. He sat erect now, like a man who was prepared to face the world whatever fate might have in store for him. His eyes were no longer half closed. And in them there was a light—not exactly of hope, not exactly of confidence, and yet a blending of both—which changed the character of his face entirely.

I had the feeling—and I am glad that I did him justice in that—that this change had little or nothing to do with his own fate, now so soon to be decided. Long afterwards he told me that the relief which his wife's story had brought to his mind was the cause of any change that I had noted in him. Now that he knew that she was, and had

always been worthy of his devotion, his confidence and his love, nothing else was of any consequence by comparison.

Not that he did not wish to live, to leave that room where he had passed so many hours of torture, a free man. He wished it more than ever. For now he had a new ambition and purpose in life: to devote himself wholly and entirely to the woman who had considered her reputation before the world as nothing when weighed in the balance against his life.

"Gentlemen," said the Court, addressing himself to the District Attorney and me, "I have received a note from the jury, in which they request that a portion of Glover's testimony be read to them.

"Turn to Glover's testimony, please," he said to the stenographer. "Now, read that portion which pertains to the tearing of the card. People's Exhibit A."

The stenographer proceeded to read in that even, colourless voice, which seems to be the marked characteristic of all stenographers in my observation:

“Question by Mr. Gray: ‘Now, Mr. Glover, I call your attention to the fact that the card is torn almost in half. Can you explain how that occurred?’ Answer: ‘Yes; as I took the card from Strickland’s pocket, he snatched it out of my hand, and started to tear it in half. Before he had torn it all the way, I managed to get hold of it again.’ Question:—”

“That’s enough,” said the foreman.

He turned to the other jurors, and for a moment they could be seen whispering together in an animated manner. Meanwhile, Dr. Morgan, who had not been present, it may be remembered, while Glover was giving his testimony, came over to where Gray and I were standing, his face blazing with excitement.

“Is that all, gentlemen?” asked His Honour.

“One moment, if Your Honour pleases,” replied the foreman. After a short conference with his fellow jurors, he said:

“Your Honour, the jury would like to ask Mr. Strickland a few questions.”

“Do you consent to the case being re-opened, gentlemen?” questioned the Court.

“Yes, Your Honour,” replied Gray.

“Mr. Arbuckle?”

“Yes, Your Honour.”

A day earlier, I would have been put to it to know what to say. Considering that my client refused absolutely to give me the least aid in preparing his defence, I would have been prepared to have him show himself equally obstinate when it came to the question of his taking the stand. But to-day, I had reason to hope—

“Mr. Strickland, are you willing to take the stand?” asked the Court.

“Yes, Your Honour,” said Strickland in a ringing voice.

And my reasons are sound, I said to myself, completing my own thought.

“What is your name?” asked the clerk, after he had administered the oath.

“Robert Strickland.”

And now the foreman took a hand.

“Mr. Strickland, several members of the jury

have requested me to ask you why you attempted to destroy the card with the combination to Mr. Trask's safe on it."

"You need not answer that question unless you want to," cautioned Judge Dinsmore.

"I didn't attempt to destroy it," said Strickland simply.

"You mean that you didn't tear the card?"

"I did not."

"Do you know who did?"

"No, sir."

"Did you know the card contained the combination to the safe?"

"Not until I heard it the other day in court. I saw some figures on the card, but they had no significance to me. I never thought of the card from the time I looked at the address on it until I saw it here in court."

"Do you mean that you didn't see or feel Mr. Glover take it from your pocket?"

"No, sir, I did not. I was almost blind with pain at the time."

"That's all."

Strickland stepped down. And his step had a

life and a lightness that it had lacked for many a long day.

"With Your Honour's permission," I said, "I will recall Dr. Morgan."

I never felt more serious in my life. And one of the things that contributed to this state of mind was my regret that McLean was not sitting where I could see his face.

"Any objection, Mr. Gray?"

"No, Your Honour."

"Dr. Morgan," I asked, as slowly and impressively as I could, when he had once more taken the stand, "on the night of the shooting, did you examine the defendant?"

"Yes, sir. When I found that it was too late to do anything for Mr. Trask, I turned my attention to Mr. Strickland."

"In what condition did you find him?"

"He was lying on his back on the floor in a semi-conscious condition, moaning with pain."

"Did you examine his arm?"

"Yes, sir. I examined it very carefully while Mr. Glover, with the police officers were testing the safe."

"Will you describe the condition of the arm, please?"

"The arm had been struck a terrific blow with a heavy cane. The blow fell squarely on the wrist, dislocating the wristjoint. Both bones of the forearm—the radius and the ulna—were badly fractured. It was the worst fracture I have ever seen."

"Now, Dr. Morgan, in your opinion, could the defendant have torn this card, as you see it here, between the time his arm was broken and the time you arrived?"

"He could not, sir. The hand was entirely paralysed. It would have been a physical impossibility, assuming even that his mental state would have permitted of it. The bones haven't knitted yet. At that time, he couldn't have moved the arm or the hand a fraction of an inch."

"That's all, Dr. Morgan."

I waited a minute until Dr. Morgan had stepped down, then I turned to Mr. Gray.

"Do you know where Glover is, Mr. Gray?"

"The last time I saw him, he was in my office, reading," said Gray.

He seemed just a little sulky.

“Try to find Mr. Glover, please,” I said to an attendant.

Not even when Mrs. Strickland was on the stand had there been a more tense feeling in the court room. The very air was electric.

I rather plume myself upon not being susceptible to such influences as a rule. But I have to admit that I felt it this time. It must be confessed that there was a certain excitement about it.

Supposing the obliging Mr. Glover—I say “obliging,” for I know of no term that seems to me to describe more fitly the air of cheerful willingness which he habitually wore—had wearied of his reading and left my colleague’s comfortable quarters? Supposing, even, that, as would have been only natural to a young man of his energy and intelligence, he had decided to look for new fields for the employment of his talents? I had been given to understand that his connection with the Trask family was at an end, Mrs. Trask having no further use for his services. There was nothing as far as I could learn to bind young

Glover to New York. And youth has ever loved adventure and change.

I turned and walked back to say a word to Strickland. I was able, thus, to give McLean a look. He was not at all downcast. On the contrary, his face wore a look that was nothing short of malignant. I felt positively relieved to notice that he was glaring at the door. Young Mr. Glover might have had a bad quarter of an hour, if he had met McLean alone in a forest, say!

The very next second Mr. Glover appeared, escorted by the attendant. I was glad to see him. I had liked him from the first moment I had seen him at the inquest.

"Will you be good enough to take the stand, Mr. Glover?" I asked cheerfully.

Mr. Glover did so.

"I'm sorry to trouble you again, but there's one little point upon which we're not quite clear, and—"

"I'll be glad to do anything in my power," interrupted Mr. Glover.

His manner was affability itself.

"Thank you. You remember, Mr. Glover,

that while you were waiting for the police to arrive you happened to think of this card which you thought might help the police?"

"Yes, and I was right, too."

"Indeed, you were. Now, Mr. Glover, you will recall that you proceeded to search Mr. Strickland's pockets in the hope of finding this card."

"Yes; and I found it."

There was a new note in Mr. Glover's voice that had not been there before. Not exactly assertiveness, not exactly aggressiveness; I should say that it was just a shade nearer defiance. But he was still going to be obliging. I felt convinced that when he left the stand I should be in his debt.

"Precisely. It was in his coat pocket you found it, I believe."

"Yes."

"Which pocket?"

"Side pocket."

"Now, if you don't mind, I'd just like to have you describe that scene once more in detail. Where was Mr. Strickland?"

"He was on the floor, lying on his back,"

"And you were standing over him?"

"Yes."

"On which side of him?"

"The right side."

"And as you bent over him and went through his pockets, did he make any attempt to prevent you?"

"Oh, yes; he tried to push me away."

"That is, he kept warding you off like this?"—
I made a motion with my right arm—"That right?"

"Yes."

"Finally, however, you succeeded in getting the card?"

"Yes."

"Let's see. That was in the left side pocket of the coat, wasn't it?"

"Left side? Let me see. Yes."

"When you got the card, you straightened up, didn't you, with the card in your right hand?"

"That's correct."

"But before you had the chance to get the card out of his reach, he raised himself on his right elbow, and with his left hand snatched the card

out of your hand. That's all right so far, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"If I'm wrong in any of these details, just put me straight. My memory fails me sometimes."

"All right; I'll let you know when you make a mistake."

"Good! Now there was something else. I must ask you to be just a little patient with me."

"Certainly."

His manner was growing more and more affable.

"Oh, yes! Strickland snatched the card. Then he tore it. Now, *how* did he tear it?"

"How? What do you mean?"

"Well, I mean, did he tear it quickly, or slowly, or—"

"Well, rather quickly. Because I snatched it back almost instantly."

"Just a moment now; I want to get this straight. Strickland had the card in his left hand—like this. Right?"

"Yes."

"And he was supporting himself on his other elbow—like this. Yes?"

"Yes."

"Then he made a quick backward movement—like this—tearing the card almost in half. Is that it?"

"That's right."

"I see. And then you took the card away from him?"

"Yes."

"And he threatened you, didn't he, as you took the card?"

"Yes. He swore at me and said he'd fix me."

"And if I remember correctly, you said that he made a quick pass for his revolver—like this?"

"Yes; but it was out of his reach."

"That explains it all beautifully. You've cleared up things for us, Mr. Glover. We're greatly indebted to you."

"Not at all. Is there anything else?"

"No, I think that's all. Oh, just a moment."

"Certainly."

"Mr. Stenographer, will you read the latter part of Dr. Morgan's testimony, please?"

He had started to leave the stand, when I had asked for just one more moment. As I made my request to the stenographer, I noticed that his expression altered slightly. He looked just a little uneasy. I moved up closer to his side while we both listened to hear what Dr. Morgan had had to say.

“Question, by Mr. Arbuckle: ‘Now, Dr. Morgan, in your opinion, could the defendant have torn this card, as you see it here, between the time his arm was broken and the time you arrived?’ Answer: ‘He could not.’ Question: ‘You are sure of this?’ Answer: ‘Yes; the hand was entirely paralysed. It would have been a physical impossibility, assuming even that his mental state would have permitted it. The bones haven’t knit yet. At that time he couldn’t have moved his arm or hand the fraction of an inch.’ ”

“Glover! What did you do with that ten thousand dollars?”

“What are you talking about? What do you mean? What ten thousand dollars?”

He was absolutely panic-stricken.

“Your Honour, I ask for a warrant for the ar-

rest of this man as an *accomplice to the murder of Gerald Trask.*”

“No, no, Your Honour, it isn’t true!” he screamed. “I didn’t kill him! I didn’t! I took the money, but I didn’t kill him! Here’s the money!” He snatched it from the inside pocket of his coat and actually held it out towards His Honour. They looked to be the same crisp, new bills that Strickland had handed over to Trask. No doubt they were. “Take it, take it! I don’t want it! I’ll plead guilty—I’ll go to jail! But don’t arrest me for the murder!”

“I’ll tell how it happened, I’ll tell everything. I didn’t know Strickland was coming. I planned the robbery that night. When Trask gave me the money, I put it in the safe, but I didn’t lock the safe. I left it open. He didn’t notice it. Then I came back for the money. I didn’t know about Strickland. It’s God’s truth!”

“Mrs. Trask heard me come in. She came back into the room and I choked her. But she’s all right. She’s not hurt. That’s not murder! I got the money, then I saw Strickland come in. I didn’t know he was coming. I didn’t. I swear

I didn't! I'm innocent! I'm innocent, I tell you! I left the room.

"Then I heard the shot, and came back. It was the first I knew of it. I'm innocent, I tell you! Send me to jail. Give me twenty years—I don't care. But don't try me for murder! I tore the card so they'd think that Strickland had planned the burglary. We weren't working together. Ask him. He'll tell you we weren't. I didn't know he was coming. Ask him. He'll tell you."

He suddenly darted from the stand and rushed across to the table where Strickland was sitting.

"Strickland!" he shrieked, hammering the table with his clenched fist, "tell them, tell them we weren't working together!"

Strickland's curling lip was the most eloquent of answers.

"Remove the man," ordered Judge Dinsmore.

"I didn't kill him! Don't railroad me! I'm innocent, I tell you! Don't, don't!"

Two officers seized him and dragged him out of the room. His frenzied screams could be heard from far down the corridor.

CHAPTER XX

THE VERDICT

"You may resume your deliberations, gentlemen," said the Court.

"We have agreed already, Your Honour."

It was the foreman of the jury who spoke.

"Robert Strickland!" commanded the clerk.

Strickland rose, and stood erect in his place. His eyes were untroubled. But the lines about his firm mouth deepened. Mrs. Strickland held out her arms, and gathered Doris into them.

"Prisoner, look upon the jury; jury, look upon the prisoner.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed upon a verdict?"

"We have," said the foreman.

"And how do you find, gentlemen?"

"We find the defendant not guilty."

I heard a wailing cry of "Robert!"

The next moment Strickland had his wife in his arms.

THE END

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